

The Dutch and German Communist Left (1900–68)

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# The Dutch and German Communist Left (1900–68)

*'Neither Lenin nor Trotsky nor Stalin!'  
'All Workers Must Think for Themselves!'*

*By*

Philippe Bourrinet



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This work is a revised and English translation from the Italian edition, entitled *Alle origini del comunismo dei consigli. Storia della sinistra marxista olandese*, published by Graphos publishers in Genoa in 1995. The Italian edition is again a revised version of the author's doctorates thesis presented to the Université de Paris I in 1988.

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This book is printed on acid-free paper and produced in a sustainable manner.

*In memoriam*

Constant (Stan) Poppe (1899–1991)

Maximilien Rubel (1905–1996)

Serge Bricianer (1923–1997)

Ngo Van (1913–2005)

Maurice Brinton (1923–2005)

Paul Avrich (1931–2006)

and

Cajo Brendel (1915–2007)

• •  
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I would particularly like to thank the International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam (IISG), the Arbejder-bevaegelsens Bibliotek og Arkiv, Copenhagen (ABA), the Schweizerisches Sozialarchiv, Zürich, the Bibliothèque de Documentation Internationale Contemporaine, Nanterre (BDIC), the Centre International de Recherches sur l'Anarchisme, Lausanne (CIRA), and the Historische Kommission, Berlin, without which this work (originally a university-doctorate at Paris–I–Sorbonne) would not have been possible.<sup>1</sup>

Thanks to the late and greatly missed Professor Jacques Droz (1909–98) and also to Professor Georges Castellan (1920–2014) for his support in obtaining a doctoral stipend in the former East Germany, only a few years before the fall of the Berlin Wall. I would like to thank the personnel of the Staatsbibliothek, East Berlin and the archives in Potsdam and Merseburg for their assistance. This help was not without its difficulties, given the impossibility of accessing sensitive archives, in particular those of the ex-IML (Institute of 'Marxism-Leninism'), which are today freely accessible in reunified Berlin.

I am particularly indebted to Cajo Brendel, an old militant of the GIC, and to Gerd Callesen of the Copenhagen ABA, for the texts which they agreed to supply me with. In spite of 'disagreements' over our differing interpretations of council-communism, Cajo Brendel did not fail to provide me with invaluable biographical notes and historical data. What is more, he had the patience to read all my work and transmitted his fraternal and apt criticisms to me.

There are many others to whom I am indebted for their assistance: Fred Ortmans and Kees Ijpelaan (Netherlands); Hans Schafranek and Georg Scheuer (Austria), the latter a militant of the Revolutionary Communists of Germany (RKD) who died in 1996; the historians Arturo Peregalli, who sadly died in 2001, and Bruno Bongiovanni (Italy); Gottfried Mergner, who died in 1999, and Hans Manfred Bock (Germany); Mark Shipway and Adam Buick (Great Britain); Nils (Norway); Henri Simon; and Jenny Levy-Prudhommeaux (France – daughter of André Prudhommeaux) whom I thank for lending me her father's collection of the KAPD's *Kommunistische Arbeiter Zeitung*.

---

1 Thesis (22 March 1988): *The Foundations of the International Council-communist Current – The Dutch Communist Left (1907–50). From Tribunism to 'Councilism'*. The jury was composed as follows: Antoine Prost, Professor at Paris–I; Madeleine Rebérioux, Professor at Paris–VIII; Pierre Broué, Professor at Grenoble University; Hans Manfred Bock, Professor of Political Science at the Kassel Gesamthochschule.

I would like to pay tribute to the memory of militants like Jan Appel (1890–1985), KAPD delegate to the Second and Third Congress of the Comintern, member of the GIC in the 1930s; and Ben Sijes (1908–81) a former member of the GIC; and also that of Stan Poppe (1899–1991), with whom I had the opportunity to engage in political discussions. These three old militants, by their precious living testimony, stimulated my research. They were, for me, the proof that the spirit of council-communism is still alive today.

Certain suggestions and criticisms from Madeleine Rebérioux (1920–2005), Pierre Broué (1926–2005) – whose memory I here salute –, Hans Manfred Bock and Antoine Prost were very valuable in the re-writing and expansion of some of the chapters of my doctoral thesis.

# Illustrations

## Part 1: The Dutch Socialist and Communist Left before 1923 (Fig. 1–14)

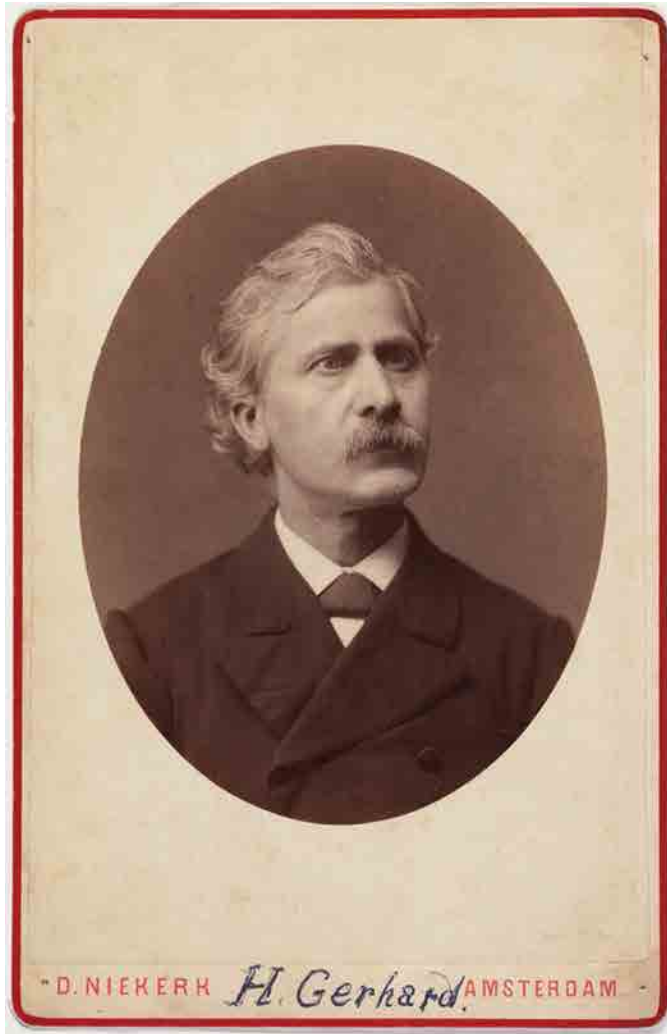


FIGURE 1 *Hendrik Gerhard (1829–1886), the “father of the socialism” in the Netherlands*

PHOTOGRAPHER D. NIEKERK. SOURCE: INTERNATIONAAL INSTITUUT VOOR SOCIALE GESCHIEDENIS (IISG) AMSTERDAM, BG A5/331 (PHOTO)



FIGURE 2 *Ferdinand Domela Nieuwenhuis (1846–1919), Evangelical-Lutheran preacher, frontman of the Sociaal-Democratische Bond (SDB) in 1881, member of Parliament in 1888. Disappointed with parliamentary methods, he became the leading figure of the Dutch and international anarchism.*  
PHOTO: 1886. PHOTOGRAPHER: A. VAN KAMPEN. SOURCE: IISG AMSTERDAM BG A58/1722 (PHOTO)



FIGURE 3 *Josef Dietzgen (1828–1888), author of The Nature of Human Brain Work (1869), which influenced the philosophy of Anton Pannekoek and the Dutch-German council communism. Photo: ca. 1888.*  
SOURCE: LIBCOM.ORG

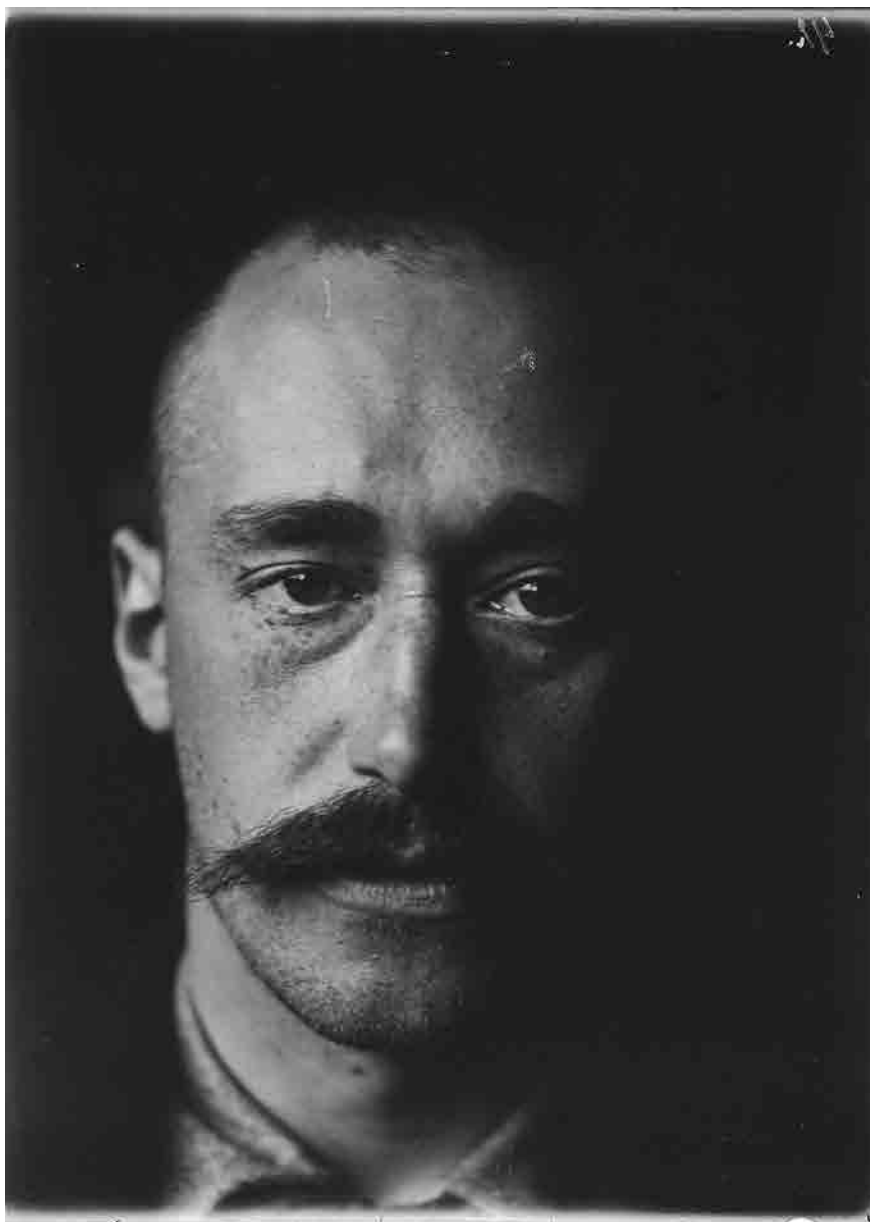


FIGURE 4 *Frank van der Goes (1859–1939), editor in 1885 of the Nieuwe Gids, the literary review of the Tachtigers, in 1894, with Pieter Jelles Troelstra and Hendrik Spiekman, one of the 12 apostles du SDAP, in 1896 founder of the Marxist review De Nieuwe Tijd, translator of Marx's Kapital into Dutch. Photo: ca. 1892.*

SOURCE: PRENTENKABINET, UNIVERSITY LIBRARY LEIDEN, WITSOI:  
PK-F-E165 GLASS NEGATIVE



FIGURE 5 *Speech by Henriëtte Roland Holst-van der Schalk (1869–1952), theoretical figure of the mass strikes in 1906, in contact with radical Marxists such as Karl Liebknecht, Rosa Luxemburg and Leon Trotsky; in 1919, she sided in the CPN with Herman Gorter, Anton Pannekoek and the left communist fraction of the party. After having broken with the CPN in 1927, she became a “religious socialist”. Photo: ca. 1903.*

SOURCE: IISG AMSTERDAM, BG A11/862



FIGURE 6 *Antonie Pannekoek, during his teaching in the Social Democratic Party School in Berlin, Nov. 1906-beginning of 1910.*

SOURCE: IISG AMSTERDAM, BG A58/172 (PHOTO)





FIGURE 7 *Herman Gorter, Wies Gorter, Richard Roland Holst, Henriëtte Roland Holst and her mother on the Buisse Heide, near Zundert, the Netherlands. Photo: ca. 1908.*  
SOURCE: LETTERKUNDIG MUSEUM (LITERARY MUSEUM), THE HAGUE, PPN:  
318709503



FIGURE 8 *SDAP Congress in Arnhem, 19–21 April 1908. Just after the congress, the revisionist leaders dismissed the Marxist editors from the local socialist press. It was the true beginning of the Tribunist opposition.*

SOURCE: IISG AMSTERDAM, BG B10/431 (PHOTO)



FIGURE 9 *The leading Committee of the SDP Rotterdam Congress, 28 May 1911. From left to right: Sam de Wolff, Willem van Ravesteyn, Herman Gorter, David Wijnkoop, Louis de Visser, Gerrit Mannoury and Jan Ceton.*

SOURCE: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS. PHOTOGRAPH: JOH. B. EGNER ('S GRAVENHAGE), 1911.

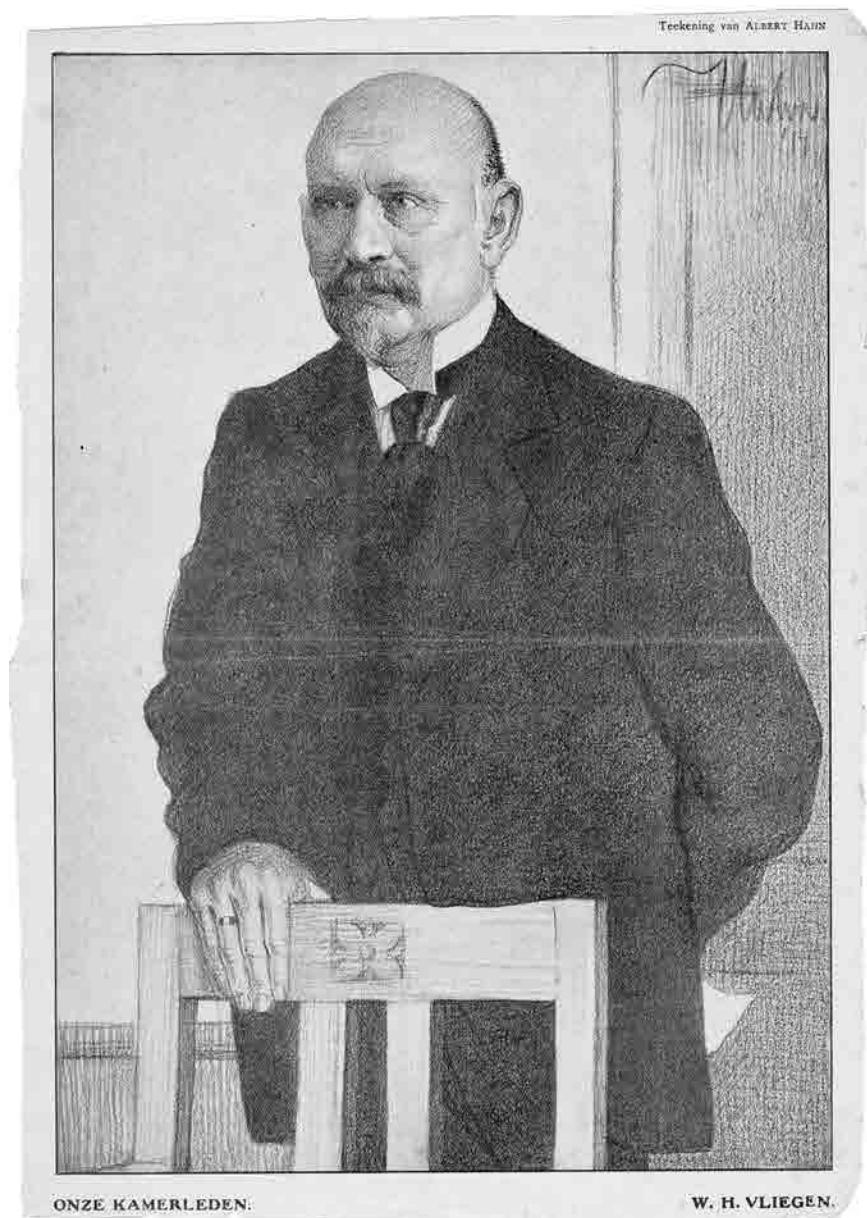


FIGURE 10 *Willem Hubertus Vliegen (1862–1947), typograph, editor of Het Volk. As reformist, partisan of the participation of the SDAP in the government in 1913, hostile to Troelstra's "revolution attempt" in November 1918. Engraving by Albert Hahn. 1914.*  
 SOURCE: IISG AMSTERDAM, BG C1/202

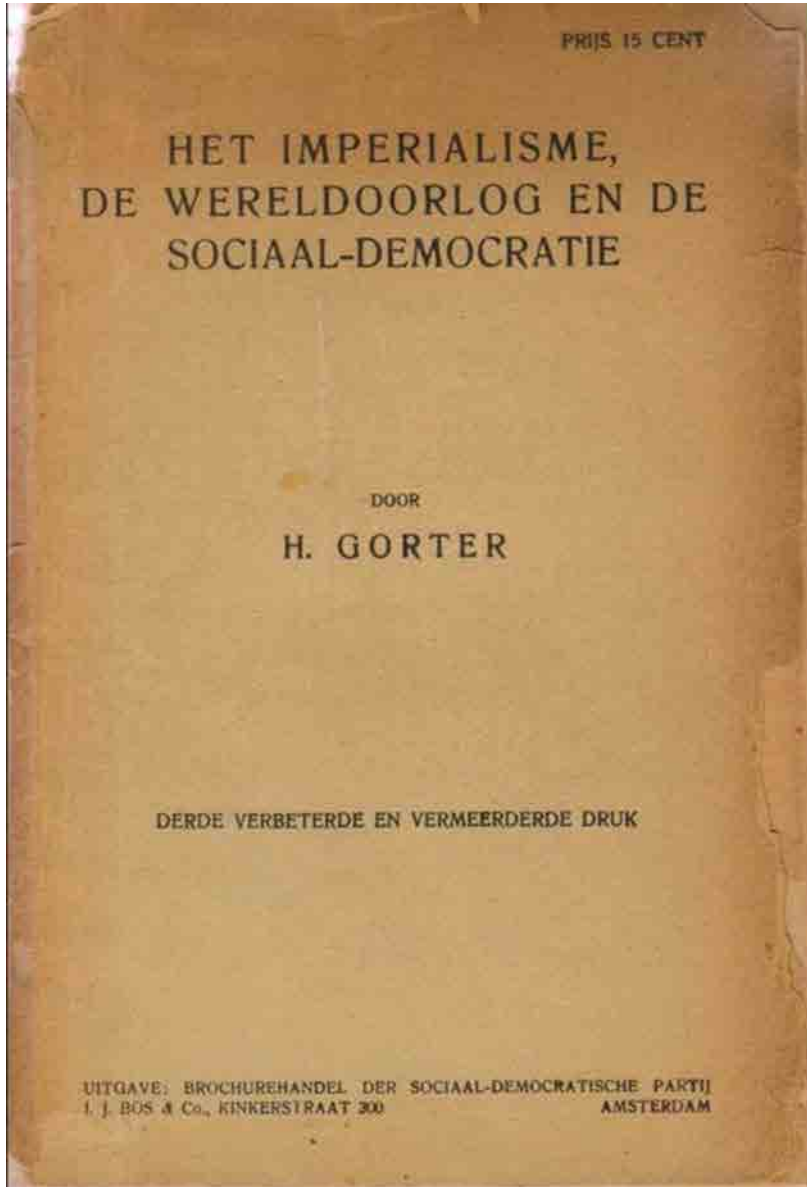


FIGURE 11 *Gorter's pamphlet against World War I and the role of the social-democracy, published in 1915 by the SDP.*

PERSONAL COLLECTION

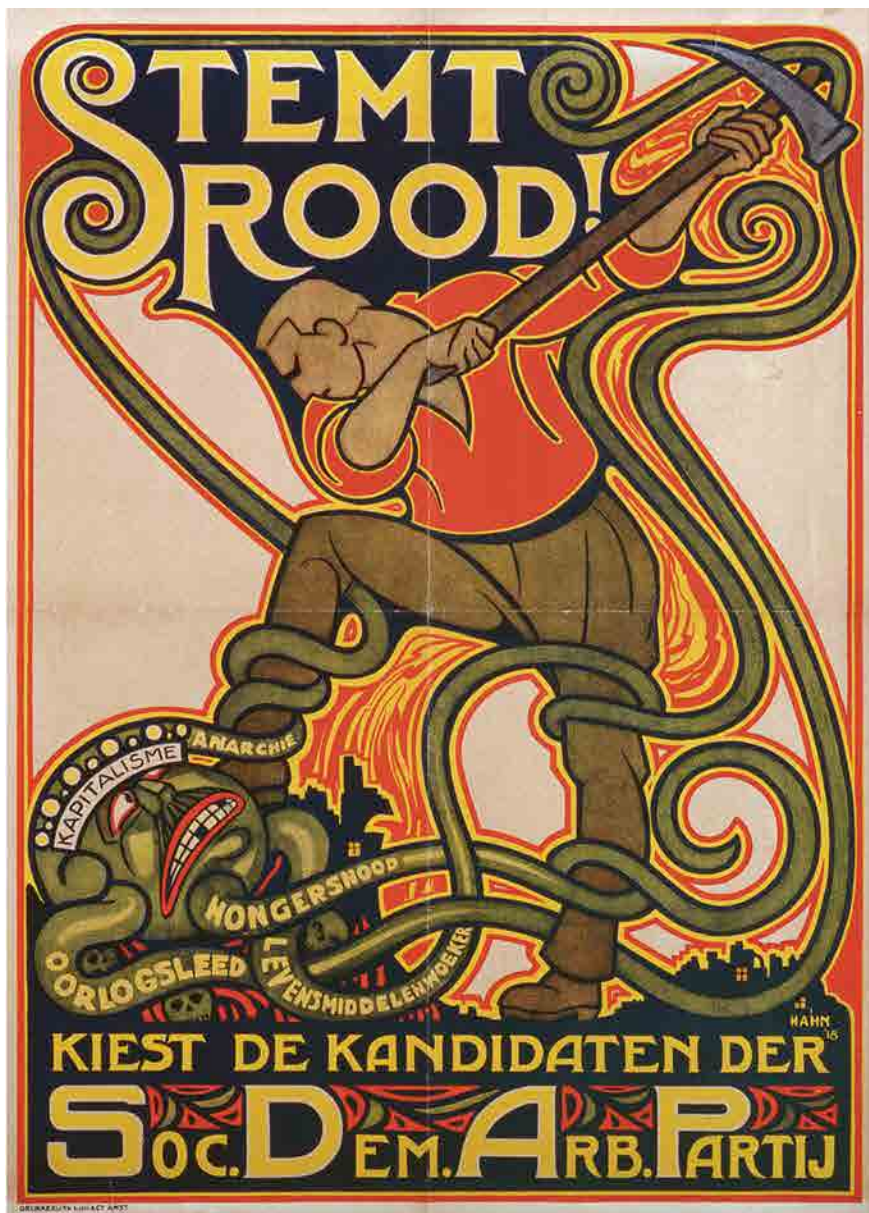


FIGURE 12 *Dutch SDAP election flyer 1918. (Vote red! / Select the candidates of the Socialist Democratic Workers Party [SDAP]). Artist: Albert Hahn (1877–1918).*  
SOURCE: IISG, AMSTERDAM, BG G1/68 (PAMPHLET)





FIGURE 13 *Groningen Congress of the CPN, 28–29 June 1919. The major figures of the “Dutch Bolshevism” are present: Van Ravesteyn, David Wijnkoop, Jan Ceton, Louis de Visser, G. Sterringa, Henk Sneevliet. Barend Luteraan, chief of the antiparliamentarist opposition, the last to right, below, will soon leave the CPN to found the KAPN.*

SOURCE: *HET LEVEN*, 8 JULY 1919. REPRINTED BY DENNIS BOS, *BAREND LUTERAAN 1878–1970, VELE WONINGEN, MAAR NERGENS EEN THUIS, HET SPINHUIS*, AMSTERDAM, 1996



FIGURE 14 *Herman Gorter, author of the Offener Brief an den Genossen Lenin, Berlin, 1920, was disappointed after the split of the German KAPD in 1922.*

SOURCE: LETTERKUNDIG MUSEUM (LITERARY MUSEUM), THE HAGUE, 6041 II 001. PHOTO: 1923



**Part 2: The German Communist Left, 1918–1945 (Fig. 15–37)**

FIGURE 15 *Heinrich Laufenberg, alias Karl Erler, Chairman of the board of workers' and soldiers of Hamburg (December 28, 1918), chief of the national-bolshevist tendency in the KPD, then in the KAPD*  
SOURCE: STAATSARCHIV HAMBURG



FIGURE 16 *Members of the Ruhr Red Army. Ruhr, Dortmund, March 1920, going to the front to fight the Reichswehr and the units of the voluntary Freikorps.*

SOURCE: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS



FIGURE 17 *Karl Schröder (Jan Beek), Member of the SPD in Berlin, 1913, then KPD November 1918, leader of the KAPD, 1920–22*

PHOTO: CA. 1912. SOURCE: WWW.LEFT-DIS.NL



FIGURE 18 *Portrait of Franz Pfemfert by the expressionist painter Ludwig Meidner (1884–1966), Berlin, 1915. Franz Pfemfert was the editor of the journal Die Aktion (1911–1932), a literary critic and photographer. He was a major figure of the KAPD in 1920 to 1921, and then in the movement of the Unions (AAU and AAUE). He died, like Trotsky, Otto Rühle and Victor Serge, in exile in Mexico. SOURCE: DIE AKTION NR. 1–2, BERLIN, 1915, P. 464*



FIGURE 19 *Portrait of Oskar Kanehl (1888–1929), expressionist poet, by the expressionist painter Ludwig Meidner. Oskar Kanehl, editor of the journal Die Aktion, was a major figure of the KAPD, Berlin, 1920–1921, then of the AAU-E, 1922–1929.*

SOURCE: *DIE AKTION* NR. 27–28, BERLIN, 1916, P. 624



FIGURE 20 *Minna Faßhauer (1875–1949), People's Commissar for Education in the Socialist Republic of Braunschweig ((11/10/18–02/22/19), the first woman minister in Germany. From 1920 to 1933, active in the KAPD and FAUD. After 1933, involved in the clandestine Worker-Communist Union group, repeatedly imprisoned by the Nazis. Photo: 1919.*

SOURCE: MINNA FAßHAUER – DIE ERSTE  
MINISTERIN DEUTSCHLANDS WURDE HEUTE  
VOR 135 JAHREN GEBOREN, KULINARIA  
KATASTROPHALIA, 10. OKTOBER 2010 ([HTTP://  
GOO.GL/0PB9Y7](http://goo.gl/0PB9Y7))



FIGURE 21 *Karl Plättner (1896–1945) (alias Braun or Schuster), KPD (Hamburg, Bremen, Dresden, Magdeburg), later KAPD, “ringleader of Central Germany.” Photo taken after his arrest in Halle September 23, 1919.*

SOURCE: VOLKER ULLRICH, *DER RUHELOSE REBELL KARL PLÄTTNER 1893–1945*, C.H. BECK, MUNICH, 2000



FIGURE 22 *Alexander Schwab (pseudonyms: Franz Sachs; Sigrist), circa 1920, one of the major leading figures of the KAPD, then of the Rote Kämpfer in the thirties*

SOURCE: INTERNATIONALE WISSENSCHAFTLICHE  
KORRESPONDENZ, IWK, BERLIN, DECEMBER 2005





FIGURE 23 *Fake papers of Franz Jung in 1920 (pseudonyms: Franz Larrsch, Frank Ryberg)*  
SOURCE: FRANZ JUNG-ARCHIV, STIFTUNG ARCHIV AKADEMIE DER KÜNSTE,  
BERLIN; IDENTITY PHOTO PUBLISHED IN: MONICA LUMACHI, *RIVOLTA E  
DISINCANTO. FRANZ JUNG E L'AVANGUARDIA TEDESCA*, ARTEMIDE, ROME,  
2011



FIGURE 24 *Portrait of Maurice Disch (1888–1959), KAPD and AAU, 1920–1925, Barkenhoff-Kommune, by Heinrich Vogeler, 1922*

SOURCE: KULTURSTIFTUNG LANDKREIS  
OSTERHOLZ



FIGURE 25 *August Merges (1870–1945), President of the Socialist Republic of Brunswick (10.11.1918–22.02.1919). In April 1920, he left the KPD; he was among the founders of the KAPD. In 1935, he was sentenced to three years of imprisonment for his activism for the Workers-Communist Union (KAU). Photo: circa 1925.*

SOURCE: [HTTP://WWW.VERNETZTES  
-GEDAECHTNIS.DE/BIOMERGES.HTM](http://www.vernetztes-gedaechtnis.de/biomergeres.htm)



FIGURE 26 *East-German identity photo of Franz Peter Utzelmann (1896–1972), alias Kempin, in 1947. He was KAPD and then a “Rote Kämpfer” from 1932–1936. In March 1921 he was 24 years old and one of the main military leaders of the Leuna factory workers.*

SOURCE: HANS-RAINER SANDVOß, *DIE “ANDERE” REICHSHAUPTSTADT. WIDERSTAND AUS DER ARBEITERBEWEGUNG IN BERLIN VON 1933 BIS 1945*, LUKAS VERLAG, BERLIN 2007.



FIGURE 27 *Max Hölz (1889–1933), the German Robin Hood, wearing hat and revolver in his belt, during the workers' uprising in Central Germany, in March 1921*  
SOURCE: FRITS KOOL, *DIE LINKE GEGEN DIE PARTEI-HERRSCHAFT*,  
WALTER-VERLAG, OLTEN, 1970 (PHOTO: IISG, AMSTERDAM)



FIGURE 28 *Johannes (John) Graudenz (1884–1942), aka Thyssen or Thiessen. In 1920–1921 he was one of the preeminent leaders of the KAPD. He participated as a guest at the Third Congress of the Comintern, 1921. He was successively reporter in Moscow on behalf of the IPU and a renowned photographer in Berlin. Involved in the activities of the Red Orchestra, he was hanged on 22 December 1942 at Plötzensee Prison in Berlin.*

SOURCE: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS



FIGURE 29 *Alfred Weiland (1906–1978), circa 1943. From 1926 he was member of the KAPD and the AAU and then the KAU, 1929–1933. In 1933 and 1934, he was imprisoned in the camp Hohnstein. From 1934 and until it was incorporated into the Wehrmacht in 1944, he was one of the rebuilders of the communist group councils. Kidnapped in West Berlin by the Soviet secret services, he was tried and sentenced to prison by the East German authorities from 1950 to 1958.*  
SOURCE: [HTTP://WWW.STIFTUNG-HSH.DE/  
GESCHICHTE/SOWJET-GEFAENGNIS/  
HAFTSCHICKSALE/ALFRED-WEILAND/](http://www.stiftung-hsh.de/geschichte/sowjet-gefaengnis/haftschicksale/alfred-weiland/). PUBLIC  
DOMAIN



FIGURE 30 *Paul Kirchhoff* (1900–1972) [Eiffel], Mexican anthropologist, member since 1920 of the AAU (Freiburg) and KAPD, German Trotskyist Left Opposition after 1931, then Left Communist in Mexico, 1937–40. Identity photo taken in 1934.

PHOTO FROM [HTTP://CARLOSGARCIAMORAETNOLOGO.BLOGSPOT.NL/2011/04/PAUL-KIRCHHOFF-EL-INSTIGADOR.HTML](http://CARLOSGARCIAMORAETNOLOGO.BLOGSPOT.NL/2011/04/PAUL-KIRCHHOFF-EL-INSTIGADOR.HTML)



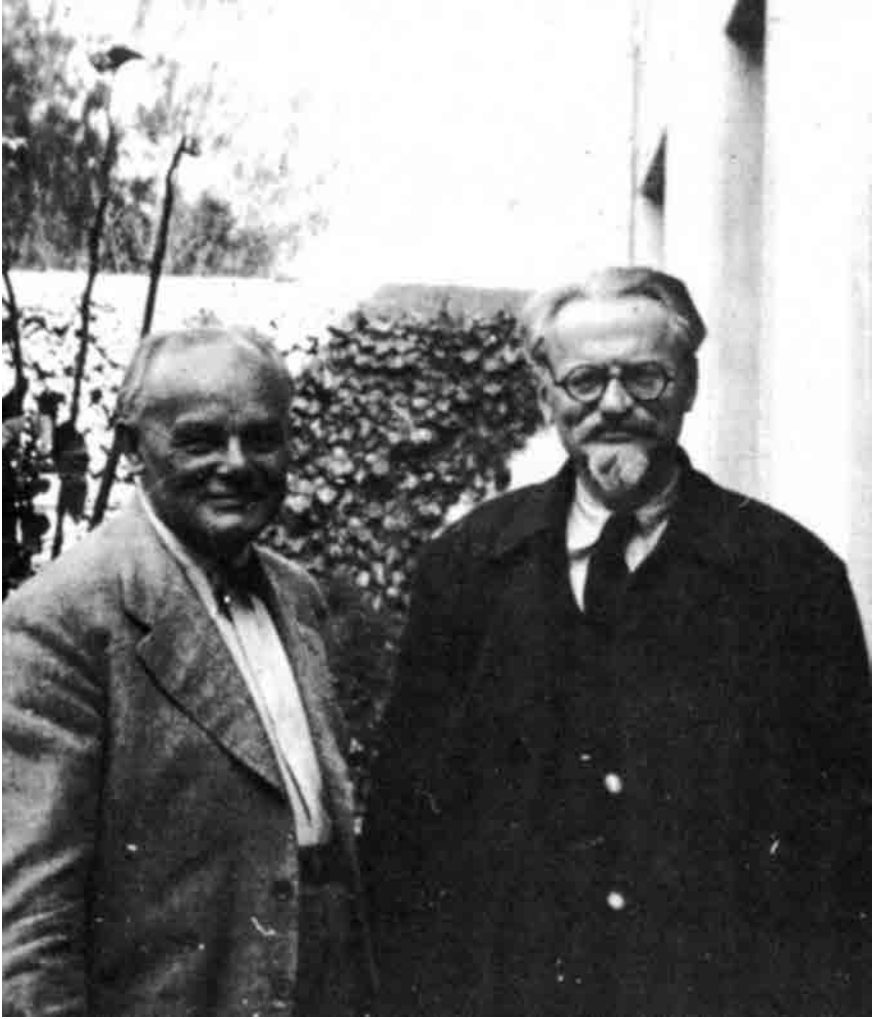


FIGURE 31 *Otto Rühle posing with his opponent, the Bolshevik Leo Trotsky, Mexico-Coyoacan in 1937*

SOURCE: MUSEO CASA DE LÉON TROTSKY MÉXICO (DIRECTOR: ESTEBAN VOLKOV, GRANDSON OF TROTSKY)



FIGURE 32 *Adam Scharrer (1889–1948), labour activist and leader of the KAPD, 1920–1933. “Proletarian writer” at the end of the 20s, as “literary exile” he hid his past and entered – without real conviction – into the service of East Germany in 1946–48. One of the last stamps of the GDR, the year of the fall of the wall, was dedicated to him for his novel Homeless Companions (Vaterlandslose Gesellen).*



FIGURE 33 *Berlin memorial plaque dedicated to Franz Pfemfert, editor of Die Aktion, Wilhelmsdorf Berlin, 2004. It notes that Pfemfert was the spokesman of the fight against nationalism and militarism and died in exile in poverty.*

PHOTO BY OTFW, BERLIN. SOURCE: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS



FIGURE 34 *Berlin memorial plaque in memory of Alexander Schwab, “writer, theoretician of architecture and resistance fighter.” Co-founder of the School of Council Workers of Greater Berlin; the KAPD; of the resistance group “Rote Kämpfer.” Imprisoned in 1936, he died in the Zwickau prison in 1943.*

PHOTO BY OTFW, BERLIN. SOURCE: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS



FIGURE 35 *Karl Schröder, Berlin, 1946, four years before his death*  
SOURCE: ANNETTE SOTTONG-HANSS, WIESBADEN,  
PHOTO PUBLISHED IN KARL SCHRÖDER, *DIE*  
*LETZTE STATION*, TEMMEN, BREMEN, 1995



FIGURE 36 *Commemorative plaque in memory of Leo Fichtmann (1873–1942), Berlin, KAPD, KAI, stonemason, active in the unemployed movement in the 1920s; taken hostage in May 27, 1942 after an anti-Nazi group (Herbert Baum Gruppe) had blown up in the square of the Lustgarten in Berlin Goebbels's propaganda exhibition "The Soviet Paradise". He was shot the next day in Sachsenhausen. His son Max (1902–1943), KAPD, KAI, and his wife Clara (1877–1944) were murdered in Auschwitz. The commemorative plaque can be found where Leo Fichtmann lived, Albert-Einstein-Straße 15, Berlin.*

PHOTO BY AXEL MAURUSZAT. SOURCE: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS





FIGURE 37 *Anonymous Portrait of Marinus van der Lubbe, 1933*  
SOURCE: IISG, ARCHIVES ANDRÉ PRUDHOMMEAUX. PUBLISHED FOR THE  
FIRST TIME IN *LA REVUE ANARCHISTE* NO. XIX, PARIS, MARCH 1934

**Part 3: The Dutch Council Communist and Internationalist Left  
(Fig. 38–52)**



FIGURE 38 *Maurits Dekker (1896–1962), proletarian writer, Amsterdam, co-founder of the Dutch Van der Lubbe Committee in 1933. Photo: ca. 1924.*

SOURCE: WIKIPEDIA COMMONS





FIGURE 39 *Lodewijk (Lo) Lopes Cardoso (1892–1944), journalist Algemeen Handelsblad, council communist; editor of the Red Book on the Reichstag fire, published by himself, Age van Agen and Maurits Dekker (21 September 1933), one of the founders of the Dutch Van der Lubbe committee. Killed by the Nazis in Auschwitz, on 8 April, 1944.*

SOURCE: PORTRAIT BY MEIJER BLEEKRODE, CIRCA 1936 (COLLECTION JOODS HISTORISCH MUSEUM, AMSTERDAM). PUBLISHED BY WWW.AAAP.BE



FIGURE 40 *Piet van Albada (1905–1997), professor of mathematics, brother of the well-known Astronomer Bruun van Albada (1912–1972), Member of the G1C like Piet. Piet van Albada had been an associate of Eduard Sirach (LAO) and Marinus van der Lubbe in Leiden. Member of the International Van der Lubbe Committee in 1933–34. Photo: 1933.*

SOURCE: WISKRANT, UTRECHT UNIVERSITY.

PUBLISHED BY WWW.AAAP.BE



FIGURE 41 *Abraham Verduin (1902–1945), Amsterdam, manufacturer of hats, secretary youth group K.A.P.N. Council communist and Jew, he died in Auschwitz. Photo: 1924.*

SOURCE: JOODSMONUMENT.NL



FIGURE 42 *Emanuel Querido (1871–1943), Herman Gorter’s editor and friend, he gave his postal address for all correspondence with the KAI (Communist Workers’ International). Publisher of the German Exile Literature after 1933, he was killed with his wife by the Nazis in Sobibor extermination camp on July 23, 1943.*

SOURCE: COLLECTIE 248–2471 IN NIOD, NEDERLANDS INSTITUUT VOOR OORLOGS-, HOLOCAUST- EN GENOCIDESTUDIES, AMSTERDAM



FIGURE 43 Spartacus, organ of the Third Front (MLL-Front), April 1942. “Meidag in oorlogstijd” (First of May in wartime). Address to the Dutch Workers.



FIGURE 44 *Co-founders of the Communistenbond Spartacus, in the garden of Jaap van Otterloo in Rotterdam-Vreewijk, Iependaal 191, in 1943. From left to right: Leen Molenaar, Jaap van Otterloo, Toon van de Berg, Jan Naaraat, Stan Poppe.*

SOURCE: *DE GROEP GERRITSEN* / BART DE CORT. – DEN HAAG: SDU  
UITGEVERS, 1998. – 134 P.; ORIGINAL: COLLECTION DICK DE WINTER.  
PUBLISHED ON THE SITE OF THE ASSOCIATION ARCHIVES ANTONIE  
PANNEKOEK ([WWW.AAAP.BE](http://WWW.AAAP.BE))

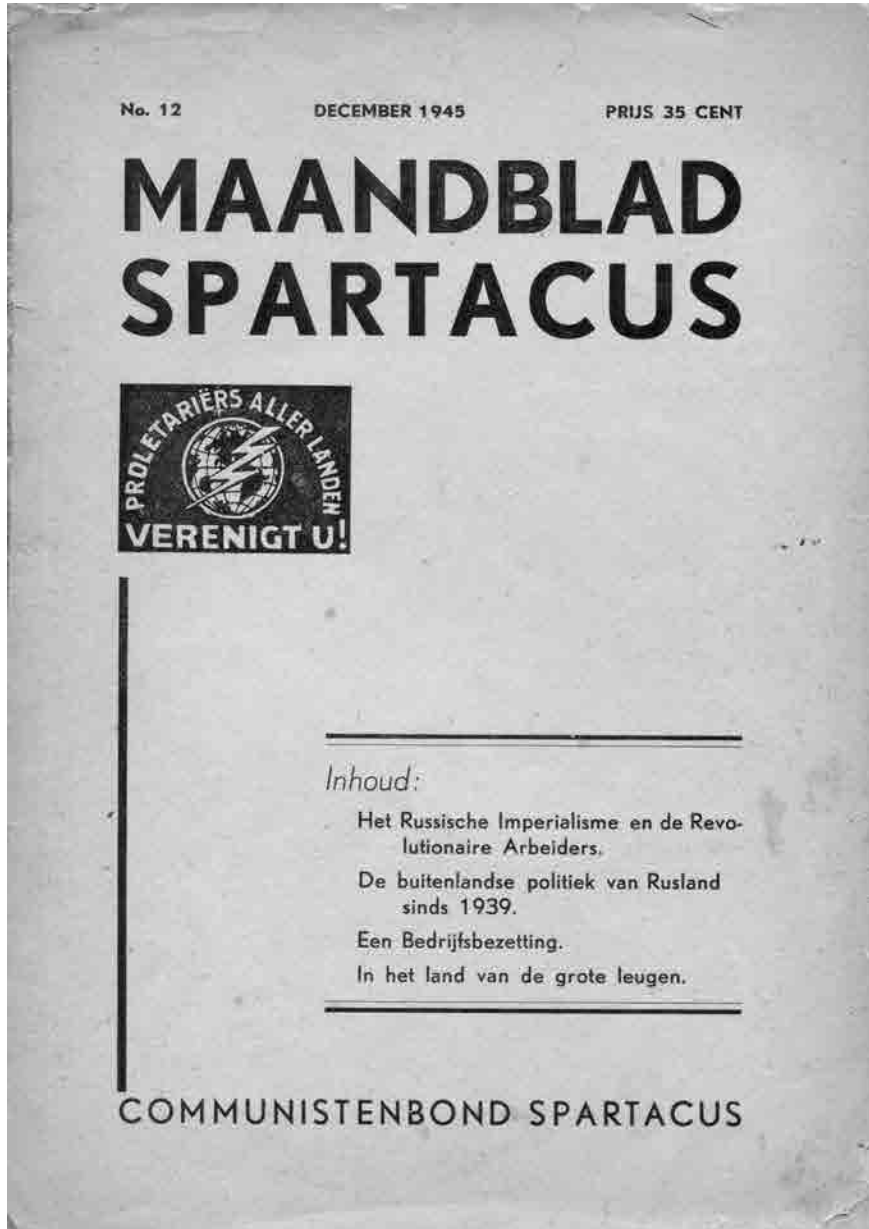


FIGURE 45 *Front cover of the monthly magazine Spartacus, issue December 1945*  
SOURCE: PERSONAL COLLECTION

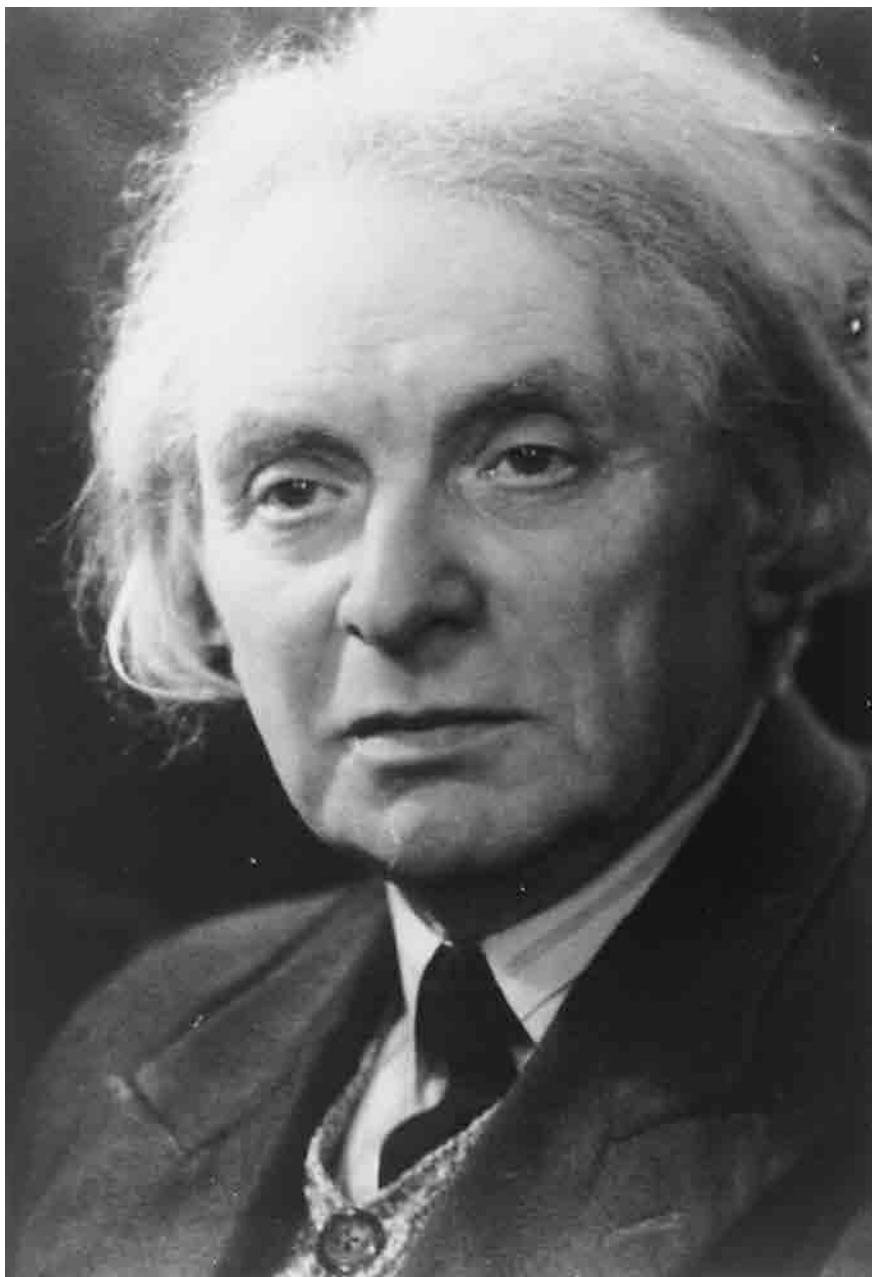


FIGURE 46 *Barend Luteraan (1878–1970), Internationalist, council communist, Trotskyist, ca. 1947*

SOURCE: IISG, AMSTERDAM BG A53/476–7. PHOTO BY  
MRS. E. MELCHERS-LUTERAAN.





FIGURE 47 *Henk Canne Meijer (1890–1962) with his wife Gé Hoogland, in Amsterdam, 1959*  
SOURCE: [WWW.AAAP.BE](http://WWW.AAAP.BE), COLLECTION ARCHIVES ANTONIE PANNEKOEK



FIGURE 48 *Paul Mattick (1904–1981) with his wife Ilse Hamm-Mattick (1919–2009), Amsterdam, 1965, on the right Monique, partner of the French Surrealist and Council Communist Louis Janover, on the left her mother; the photo was taken close to the house of Henk Canne Meijer in Amsterdam.*

SOURCE: WWW.AAAP.BE, COLLECTION



FIGURE 49 *Jan Appel (1890–1985), co-founder of the KAPD, April 1920, member of the Dutch GIC after 1928, in his apartment in Maastricht, discussing with young Internationalists: summer of 1978*

PHOTO BY CORRY DE NIET. SOURCE: WWW.AAAP.BE, COLLECTION

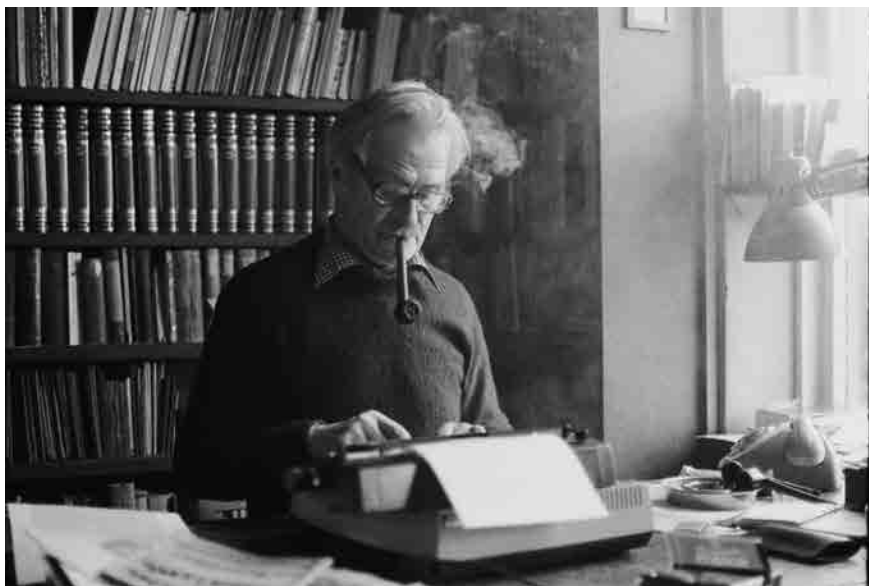


FIGURE 50 *Cajo Brendel, Council Communist, Amersfoort*

SOURCE: [HTTP://WWW.TREND.INFOPARTISAN.NET/TRD7807/CAJO02.JPG](http://www.trend.infopartisan.net/TRD7807/CAJO02.JPG).

PHOTO TAKEN IN 1978 BY MARCEL VAN DER LINDEN



FIGURE 51 *Benjamin Aäron Sijes (1908–1981), Council Communist (GIC) and historian, editor of Pannekoek's Herinneringen, Van Gennep, Amsterdam, 1976*  
PHOTO TAKEN ON 3 MARCH 1965 BY JAC. DE NIJS / ANEFO. SOURCE:  
NATIONAAL ARCHIEF, THE HAGUE (ARCHIVE NR.: 2.24.01.03; COMPONENT  
NR.: 917–4929). DOWNLOADED FROM WIKIMEDIA COMMONS ON 19 JULY  
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FIGURE 52 *Ten leading figures of the Internationalist Marx-Lenin-Luxemburg Front (MLL Front), shot by the Nazis, the first ones above (included Henk Sneevliet) in Amersfoort, 13 April 1942, the two last ones below in Woudenberg, 16 October 1942.*

SOURCE: DICK DE WINTER, *AB MENIST*

*REVOLUTIONAIR-SOCIALISTISCH VAKBONDSLEIDER, POLITICUS EN VERZETSSTRIJDERS*, EBURON, DELFT, 2010

# Introduction

Despite the theoretical and political notoriety of Gorter and Pannekoek in the international workers' movement, the communist left in the Netherlands remains the least well-known of the left-currents that emerged firstly in the Second International, then in the Communist International, and finally outside of it.

This lack of recognition is due in part to the geographical framework in which it developed – 'little Holland' – and to the fact that the Dutch language has never been a language of international communication.

However, the Dutch current did have its 'moment in the sun', in the years before the First World-War. The 'Tribunist' SPD – named after its periodical *De Tribune* – was one of those rare currents which, like the Russian Bolsheviks and the Bulgarian '*Tesnyaki*', went so far as to split in order to form a party rid of reformist and revisionist elements. A minuscule party isolated from the mass of Dutch workers, the SPD constituted a particularly influential tendency of the revolutionary left in the Second International, above all on the theoretical level. Gorter, who was less a theoretician than a great populariser, was one of the most widely translated Marxist authors. The theoretically more profound Pannekoek was more than capable of standing up to Kautsky in the discussion on the 'mass-strike' that sprang from the Russian experience of 1905. He compares with Rosa Luxemburg in his theoretical rigour, and even influenced Lenin's major work, *State and Revolution*. Pannekoek had close ties with the Bremen left (*Bremer Linke*) and exercised as profound an influence on the 'radicalism' of the German left as did Rosa Luxemburg.

But it was, above all, after 1917 that the Dutch current appeared as an international left-communist current, working within the Third International. At the head of the Amsterdam Bureau of the Third International and oriented towards the left on questions of tactics, it aligned itself completely with the left of the KPD, from whose ranks sprang the KAPD, the most radical party of the German working masses. This alignment was so complete that for nearly fifteen years, the history of the German left (KAPD and *Unionen*) blended with that of the Dutch communist left of Gorter and Pannekoek, despite repeated splits. There is not, on the one hand, a German left and, on the other, a Dutch communist left, but a truly German-Dutch communist left, with Gorter as its leading political figure.

In the history of the Communist International (Comintern), the German-Dutch communist left, under the theoretical leadership of Gorter and Pannekoek, was the first left-current to lead the international opposition to the

trade-unionist and parliamentary theses adopted by the International's leadership. More than the Italian 'Bordigist' current, whose opposition to the Comintern in 1919–20 was restricted to anti-parliamentarism, the German-Dutch current was the only one which criticised in depth and in a resolute manner the orientation of the Russian Bolsheviks. It was this which finally led to the expulsion of the Gorter-Pannekoek tendency from the Comintern in 1921, along with the KAPD and other groups defending the same orientation in Britain and Bulgaria.

The German-Dutch communist left, born in the wake of a German Revolution in retreat, suffered rapid decay. The attempt by Gorter and part of the KAPD to artificially found another International, the Communist Workers' International (KAI), failed miserably. The German-Dutch current, and first and foremost its largest organisation, the KAPD, decomposed amidst a state of general confusion. Pannekoek retired temporarily from political activity and Herman Gorter, who had been the most politically dynamic element of this current, found himself isolated until his death in 1927.

Due to its hasty exit from the Comintern and the abortion of the KAI, which left a grave legacy of demoralisation, the German-Dutch current found itself isolated at the international level, condemned to a decline into endless factional struggles and nationwide retreat. When other oppositions emerged within the Comintern between 1925 and 1927 – the 'ultra-left' fractions of the KPD and the 'Bordigist' faction of the Communist Party of Italy (PCd'I) – the German-Dutch current was politically and organisationally incapable of rallying behind their banner. The 'ultra-left' fractions of the KPD disintegrated rapidly. The 'Bordigist' current, expelled from the PCd'I and the Comintern by 1926, followed its own path, forming its own international tendency in exile around the journals *Bilan* and *Prometeo*. As for the Trotskyist current, which belatedly coalesced around 1928–30, as an opposition rather than as a fraction, its own political positions (trade-unionism, parliamentarism, defence of the USSR as a socialist state) were too alien to those of left-communism for the latter to be able to exert influence over it.

By 1927, what remained of the German-Dutch current had little in common with the KAPD and Gorter, who had previously embodied Western *Linkskommunismus*. With the progressive decline of the Berlin KAPD and Gorter's Dutch KAPN, it consisted of council-communist groups, both in Germany and in the Netherlands, more and more influenced by the anti-authoritarian theories of Otto Rühle or by the syndicalist conceptions inside the Unionist movement. The Dutch GIC – Group of Internationalist Communists – founded in 1927 around Canne Meijer, Appel, Piet Coerman, and Pannekoek (who had returned to revolutionary activity) gradually developed into the main pole of the international 'councilist' movement.



It is the GIC in the Netherlands that best represented the council-communist movement after 1933. Initially linked with the German *Unionen*-movement (KAU), the GIC found itself faced with the heavy responsibility – following the triumph of Nazism in Germany in 1933 – of assuming the practical and theoretical tasks of the German council-communist movement, which had been forced underground. The group around Mattick in the USA, itself council-communist, was too far away for any hope of regrouping these scattered forces. Also the GIC's activity was a mixture of theoretical boldness and hesitation on its organisation of work by its rejection of all centralism in favour of a loose federalism in its functioning; and its reluctance to take full responsibility for the tasks of an international organisation of council-communists, all contributed to the disaggregation of the international *Rätekommunisten*-movement, even if this was not the only reason. The GIC's opposition to the German left's basic positions, kept alive by clandestine groups in Germany (the theses of the decadence of capitalism and the necessity of a political organisation) led to a definitive split between these groups and the GIC. From 1935 onwards, following the failure of the Copenhagen joint conference, it is impossible to speak of a unified German-Dutch council-communist movement. The Dutch communist left, essentially in the form of the GIC, withdrew more and more into its own national context. It broke out of its isolation as war broke out in Spain and, very temporarily, in 1937, when it forged links with groups in Belgium and France which had split from Trotskyism and were drawing closer to council-communism. After the war, between 1946 and 1948, Spartacusbond established international contacts with the whole internationalist milieu.

Despite obvious organisational weaknesses and political ambiguities which brought it surprisingly close to the anarchist movement, which, in other respects, it had rejected, the GIC remained a Marxist revolutionary organisation. In practice, it could retain its intransigent Marxism because it was not content to be merely a group for study or 'Marxological' work. For this small group, internationalism meant remaining faithful to the cause of the world-proletariat by preparing itself for a resurgence of the world-revolution, a future development it hoped to be imminent. In a historically unfavourable period for revolutionary groups, the 'midnight in the century', it was one of the very few organisations that consciously chose to swim against the tide, at the cost of increasing isolation from the proletariat. The GIC always refused to support bourgeois democracy against fascism. It rejected the defence of the USSR and all nationalist movements of 'national liberation'. In the dark and tragic period of the 1930s, when the whole of Europe was turning towards an 'inevitable war', the GIC ceaselessly advocated an internationalist outlook in all the belligerent blocs. It untiringly defended the need for a 'worldwide workers' revolution' as the

only solution for a world that was sinking into barbarism and where daily life was characterised by poverty, war, and mass-terror. At the time of the Civil War in Spain, the GIC was one of those rare groups which called on the Spanish workers to struggle not on the military fronts but on the 'class-front', for 'the overthrow of the Spanish Republican bourgeoisie'.

The internationalist positions of the GIC were, in fact, a historical legacy inherited from the German left-communist current. The distinctive elements of the Dutch communist left in the 1930s – anti-Bolshevism and the refusal to constitute an international political organisation – prevented it from making an accurate and rigorous assessment of the revolutionary period experienced in the 1920s. Badly prepared for underground-work and the struggle against the war, lacking a solid organisational framework, the Dutch communist left vanished in May 1940, even as the first shots were fired in the Netherlands. Nevertheless, the contacts were maintained and several militants (Ben Sijes) played an active role in the February Strike of 1941.

In fact, it was not the GIC, but the *Communistenbond Spartacus* – a split from Sneevliet's relatively large group – which, in 1942, reaffirmed political continuity with the Dutch communist left, prompting former members of the GIC to merge with it. The 'Spartacus' group was the only Dutch internationalist group which, from 1942 to 1945, carried out continuous and organised activity against the World-War and against both military camps. However, its ties with the tradition of the German communist left (KAPD) were renewed only briefly, and the *Communistenbond* soon adopted the 'councilist' positions of the old GIC, organising in federalist and autonomous work-groups. Demoralised by the period following the war due to the lack of revolutionary upheavals, the *Bond* lost all the influence that it had gained with part of the Dutch proletariat. From being numerically the most important revolutionary group in 1945, the *Communistenbond* transformed itself into a small nucleus confined to the Netherlands. With the group's disappearance in the 1980s, the Dutch councilist movement effectively ceased to exist.

As an old current, connected to Dutch and German council-communism, 'councilism' disappeared. There is no longer an historical council-communist current today. The 'councilist' groups which appeared in the 1970s, in Scandinavia and elsewhere, disappeared as quickly as they emerged. Those councilist groups that may continue to exist, or that may appear in the future in the form of study-circles, are in fact closer to anarchism than to the tradition of Dutch council-communism.

Contemporary ignorance about the Dutch communist left is not due solely to the geographical framework in which it developed. For nearly sixty years, the movement that Lenin termed 'leftist' fell into oblivion. Few historians of

the workers' movement recall that the German-Dutch communist left had the 'honour' – along with the 'Bordigist' left – of being the target of Lenin's famous polemic of 1920, *Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder*. The once-celebrated names of Gorter and Pannekoek were now known only to a small number of specialists in the history of the Communist International. Occasionally referred to in the annotations to Lenin's collected – incomplete – works, these names became the target of the translators' invectives, even as they remained silent on the activities of the theoreticians of the German-Dutch communist left after 1921. In the Netherlands itself, Gorter's name was only remembered as that of the great poet that he had been at the end of the previous century. Pannekoek's name was only mentioned in journals and specialist works about astronomy.

It was, above all, the period after May '68 that allowed the rediscovery of the existence of the communist left both in Germany and the Netherlands. In many countries, from the USA to Mexico, Argentina to Germany, France to Italy, as well as Scandinavia, reprints of the main texts of Gorter and Pannekoek proliferated.

References to workers' councils, before and after 1968, by situationists and 'councilists' and also groups claiming descent from the communist left, lent it greater importance. These groups, often born in the student protests, showed a renewed interest in the left-communism of the 1920s. The rise of major social movements in European countries in the late 1960s and early 1970s encouraged a number of post-'68 militants – and equally, a small number of historians of the workers' movement – to resume work on this little-known history. These militants' rejection of parliamentarism and of the union-apparatus led them to follow the thread of this history. A radical critique of the left-parties, in particular the Stalinist Communist Parties, was all the more possible as the myth of the existence of 'socialist states', such as Russia, China, Vietnam, Cuba, and so on lost its strength. Social movements in the state-capitalist countries of the Russian *glacis* – especially Poland in 1970, 1976 and 1980 – and the ideological and theoretical critique of state-capitalism everywhere created a favourable climate for the rediscovery of the German and Dutch communist lefts of the 1920s. Yet the history of the GIC and of the Dutch *Spartacusbond* in the Netherlands remained undiscovered.

Several pioneering studies have provided a basic outline of the history of the Gorter-Pannekoek current, but only for the 1920s, and within the framework of histories of the KAPD and of the German *Unionen*-movement. One could cite the examples of the books by Hans-Manfred Bock and Frits Kool. However, these writers are not really interested in the origins of the Dutch communist left, and even less interested in its evolution during the 1930s. In

France, the publication of a collection of texts by Pannekoek, translated, selected and annotated by the council-communist Serge Bricianer (1923–97), has given a more precise and accurate idea of the theoretical and political evolution of the Dutch communist left, albeit limited to just one among its leading personalities.

In the Netherlands itself, Herman de Liagre Böhl's seminal book on Gorter has shown that the Dutch left-communist current cannot be assimilated to Tribunism. From 1916 onwards, the Gorter tendency within the SPD, and later in the CPN, developed in opposition to the majority within these parties. However, the Dutch historian's study only goes as far as 1921 and is limited to Gorter's political personality. His influence on the German *Unionen* movement and the KAPD was, in fact, only just flowering at this point. The council-communist Cajo Brendel's study of Pannekoek as a theoretician, a more political work, is centred on the political and theoretical problems that Pannekoek, the Dutch communist left's most able theoretician, confronted throughout his life. But other authors' 'councilist' vision often fails to place Pannekoek in his proper historical context.

Because of the fragmentary nature of these studies, which are mainly limited to a given national framework (either Germany or the Netherlands), it has been necessary to undertake a more complete work on the Dutch communist-left current. This is a study that cannot be limited to Gorter and Pannekoek as individuals. When this was necessary, as in studies of the 1920s, the Dutch communist left has been seen through the prism of *Linkskommunismus*, whose centre of gravity was always Germany. Finally, the mass of documents accumulated in various libraries in many different languages, and the outdated character of studies that are more than ten if not twenty years old, divided between several different countries, necessitates a historical synthesis.

I do not wish to hide the difficulties encountered in this research. A study of the bibliography gives some idea of these:

- an abundance of source-material dispersed across numerous libraries in Europe, some of which remain unused or closed (such as in Eastern Europe at the time of writing, until 1991). The mass of archives, journals, internal bulletins and pamphlets is considerable;
- the need to go through thousands of pages written in different languages; Dutch, German, English, Danish, even Bulgarian. The lack of translations is a major obstacle;
- the relative scarcity of complete works, despite the studies mentioned above. It is necessary to draw partial information from a large volume of books, pamphlets and journals often inaccessible in France;

- the gradual disappearance of the main actors and their testimonies about the revolutionary period of the 1920s. The final extinction of the German-Dutch left-communist current has totally erased most of the living historical memory of this current.

On this last point, it would be remiss of me not to mention the great deal that I have learned from the testimonies of revolutionary militants like Jan Appel (former KAPD leader, then a GIC militant), an authentic proletarian revolutionary; B.A. Sijes (former GIC member) and also Cajo Brendel, former GIC militant and member of the Dutch council-communist group *Daad en Gedachte* ('Action and Thought') until 1998. All three are now dead.

I have deliberately chosen to highlight the theoretical and political positions of the German-Dutch communist-left current, as well as those of the GIC and of the *Communistenbond Spartacus*, when discussing their evolution and, indeed, their retreat. Without neglecting the social history of these different groups, their organisational history, and their historical context, to me it also seems important to evaluate their positions. They are the reflection of a whole period rich in debate and the clash of ideas, one that spanned the decline of the Russian and German revolutions; indeed, debates that are far from over. I am convinced that given their theoretical and political contributions – especially in the 1920s – the history of the Dutch left-communist current is far from a 'dead history', despite all its weaknesses, and that this current is the bearer of pertinent analysis that should not be neglected.<sup>1</sup>

In the text I have taken care to distinguish the terms 'left-communism' and 'council-communism'. German and Dutch left-communism in the 1920s situated itself on the terrain of the Russian Revolution, until September 1921 within the Communist International, and recognised the necessity of an international party. The term 'councilism' can be used only with caution to define the current represented by Rühle and the GIC, which rejected the Russian Revolution as 'bourgeois' and were opposed to the existence of any party amongst the proletariat.

I believe that the definition of the Dutch communist left as 'leftist' or 'ultra-left' is a sign of confusion, often reflecting a hostility inherited from a period where it was characterised as 'infantile'. The term 'leftism', historically, was used to define the Trotskyist and Maoist organisations that emerged and developed

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1 The collapse of the Stalinist régimes in 1989–91 has allowed historians to consult the secret archives of the Comintern and its parties, thereby supplying further details on the real weight of the 'leftist' tendencies in the early 1920s.

in the period around May 1968 and worked as opposition-currents within or outside the traditional-left parties. Given their anti-parliamentarian and their anti-trade-union positions, and their denunciation of state-capitalism in Russia, left-communism and council-communism were never in a relationship of 'critical' opposition with official leftism (social democracy and Stalinism): rather, they were in open warfare with them.

As for the term 'ultra-left', which is often equated with 'sectarianism', it only satisfactorily describes those currents which made a historic split with the KPD between 1925 and 1927. Left-communism never appeared as some pure will to be 'as left-wing as possible'. It was the revolutionary events of the period 1917–21 which gave birth to it. In the last analysis, it was its evaluation of the praxis of the revolutionary proletariat that determined its positions and its political action.

**PART 1**

*From Tribunism to Communism (1900–18)*

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## Origins and Formation of the ‘Tribunist’ Current (1900–14)

### 1 Religion, Capitalism and Colonial Empire: From the ‘Golden Age’ to the Decline

The Netherlands has been seen by some Marxists as the site of the first ‘bourgeois revolution’ in the sixteenth century. This revolution against ‘feudalism’ started with the insurrection of the Hondschoote weavers in 1566. Its outbreak was in fact the product of complex historical factors.

The birth of the Netherlands as a union of seven provinces coincided with the Calvinist revolt against Spain and the Catholic Church. Riots (*Beeldenstorm*) in which iconoclastic mobs destroyed images and statues in Catholic churches spread across the Low Countries. In reaction, Philip II sent Spanish troops commanded by the Duke of Alva, which imposed a bloody reign of terror. In 1568 began the Eighty Years’ War against Spain. During this conflict, the Prince of Orange William the Silent, as *Stadtholder*, played an important role as one of the leaders of the revolt for sixteen years. The war lasted until the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. As the southern Catholic provinces reaffirmed their loyalty to the Habsburg Empire, the Dutch northern provinces – Holland, Zeeland, Utrecht, Gelderland, Overijssel, Drenthe, Friesland and Groningen – avowed their determination to resist the absolutism of Philip II, who refused to tolerate a Calvinist enclave in the Spanish Empire, not to mention a dangerous commercial rival on the oceans. In 1581, the Dutch provinces joined together in the Union of Utrecht (the name of an anti-Spanish alliance founded in 1579) and proclaimed their independence. When, in 1588, the English fleet, allied with the insurgents, destroyed the Spanish ‘Invincible Armada’, the Republic of the United Provinces was established.

The Netherlands experienced their bourgeois golden age in the seventeenth century. Under their republican constitution (ruled by the De Witt brothers), the Netherlands seemed not only to be a strong motor of capitalist development, Amsterdam being the financial centre of Europe, but also a key centre of ‘Enlightened’ thought, under the banner of reason and religious tolerance. For example, Portuguese and Spanish Jews could settle in the country and practise their religion.

The Dutch Republic made its first great strides in the shape of mercantile capital thanks to its far-away colonies, from South Africa to the West Indies

(Brazil and North America), from Tasmania to Ceylon and Indonesia (the East Indies). The colonial companies were the jewels in the crown of Dutch capital: the West-India Company (*West Indische Compagnie*, or WIC) and particularly the United East-India Company (*Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, or VOC). The VOC was created in 1602 as a joint-stock company, and it was granted a monopoly on trading 'east of the Cape of Good Hope'. Led by a capitalist federal board of directors which became known as the *Heeren XVII* ('the 17 Gentlemen'), the VOC had the right to wage war and to conclude peace, and then to govern the territories that had become its trading-posts by force of arms.

The eighteenth century, after the wars waged by the French king Louis XIV and the British commercial power, saw the decline of Dutch supremacy. The golden age of the United East-India Company in its exploitation of Indonesia finished at the end of the eighteenth century. After the disastrous (Fourth) Anglo-Dutch War, the VOC was pushed to bankruptcy. When the Netherlands were occupied by French troops in 1795 and the Batavian Republic was proclaimed the new government abolished the VOC. In 1796, the British troops completed their definitive conquest of Dutch Ceylon. The surviving VOC territories, namely Indonesia, became the property of the Dutch state.

The Batavian Republic survived until 1806, when Napoleon I transformed the seven provinces into the Kingdom of Holland, ruled by Louis Bonaparte. This was eventually incorporated into the French Empire in 1810. One year later, British troops occupied Java and its dependencies in the name of the British East-India Company. Nevertheless, after the fall of Napoleon and the 1815 Congress of Vienna, William Frederick of Orange became William I, King of the Netherlands (which included present-day Belgium and Luxembourg until 1830). Since the Netherlands had lost its Cape-Colony, Dutch authority over Java and its dependencies could be re-established.

In 1824, the Netherlands-Commercial Company (*Nederlandsche Handels Maatschappij*, NHM) was established. King William I obtained, thanks to his own capital, a commercial monopoly over the exploitation of the colonies, most importantly Java. Mounting profits were accompanied by 'indigenous' revolts against forced labour and starvation: in Java, from 1825 to 1830, and in Sumatra until 1837. In 1830, the governor-general Van den Bosch introduced a régime of forced labour, the so-called 'culture-system' (*cultuurstelsel*), which required Javanese farmers to grow a certain number of crops for export (coffee, sugar, spices and indigo); these were sold exclusively through the NHM. Until 1870, the profits from this system of exploitation yielded large budget-surpluses for the Dutch state and an extra fortune for the King, who held shares in the NHM. State-capital drew enormous profits from the 'culture-system': 39

million florins a year. Nevertheless, with less rice to feed the local farmers, ever-increasing poverty and famine took a firm hold in the years 1845–50. Revolts broke out. Dutch military expeditions spread across the archipelago. The most important revolt was the 1873 Aceh war in northern Sumatra, which lasted for about thirty years.

Duped by the monarchy – which invested in colonial speculation, rather than in modern industry – the Dutch bourgeoisie, despite its long history, still played a secondary role until 1870, on both the economic and political levels.

The decline of the commercial bourgeoisie, its inability to develop industrial capital and its search for speculative investments in land, are all factors explaining the Netherlands' mid-nineteenth century economic backwardness. While Belgium, after winning independence from the Dutch kingdom in 1830 with French and British support, saw an industrial boom, the Netherlands remained in a state of economic stagnation. Per capita economic growth was close to zero in the Netherlands until the 1850s, despite the growing importance of foreign trade. Thus in 1849, 90 percent of the Dutch national product still came from agriculture. While three-quarters of the population lived in towns, the majority vegetated in a state of permanent unemployment and lived off alms provided by the wealthy and the churches. In 1840, 8,000 of Haarlem's 20,000 inhabitants were registered as 'poor', a figure that completely under-estimates the real situation. The physical degeneration of this sub-proletariat was such that, in order to build the first railways, the Dutch capitalists had to call upon an English workforce. In her study *Kapitaal en arbeid in Nederland*, the socialist theoretician Henriëtte Roland Holst-van der Schalk noted that: 'Since the second half of the eighteenth century, our country has entered into a state of decadence, then of stagnation and abnormally slow, defective development. In the space of a few generations, our proletariat has degenerated physically and spiritually.'<sup>1</sup> Engels analysed the Netherlands of the nineteenth century as 'a country where the bourgeoisie feeds off its past grandeur and where the proletariat has dried up.'<sup>2</sup> This opinion seems at least partly right.<sup>3</sup>

This relative decline could explain both the verbal 'radicalism' of this period when the Dutch bourgeoisie still vegetated under the domination of the state, as well as an initial (and short-lived) interest in Marxism among sections of that class. All this quickly disappeared with the first serious class-confrontations.

1 See Roland Holst 1902. The quote is from Wiessing, 1980. Mathijs Wiessing (1906–87) was an architect and 'orthodox Communist' who lived in the USSR and died in Moscow.

2 Marx and Engels 1989, pp. 335–6.

3 In 1890, the Netherlands were twice as rich (per capita) as Great-Britain, three times as much as France.

Russia, where the liberal bourgeoisie was weak, produced its local versions of people like Struve<sup>4</sup>, 'legal' Marxists, aiming to develop national capital. That was not the case in the Netherlands: with the rapid growth of industrial capital in the Netherlands after the 1850–70 period, there developed a bourgeoisie more conscious of its political class-interests. The 1890s would see the expansion of the Philips Company, destined to become one of the major international producers of light-bulbs.

In the wake of the constitutional monarchy of 1848, the Liberals around Johan Rudolf Thorbecke (1798–1872) had played an important role in reconciling the interests of the monarchy with those of conservative liberalism in several governments (1849–53, 1862–6, 1871–2). But for all that, these conservatives were more 'open' to other religious bourgeois currents than Calvinism, the official religion of the monarchy. The bourgeois parties were not sufficiently well-organised to overcome the power of the monarchy. Only in 1878 did there appear the first well-organised bourgeois party, a Calvinist party called the Anti-Revolutionary Party, which was led by Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920). The Roman-Catholic party (*Roomsche-Katholieke Staatspartij* – RKSP), which was less 'conservative', and which was initially led by the priest Herman J.A.M. Schaepman (1844–1903), was also expanding. In 1901–5 it participated in the Christian coalition-cabinet led by Kuyper, which defended religious schools and in 1903 imposed 'order' on striking transport-workers (see below). The party of the industrial bourgeoisie, the Liberal Union (*Liberale Unie*), founded in March 1885, remained weak, and in 1892 another force emerged on the left wing of Dutch liberalism, the Radical Association (*Radicale Bond*).

## 2 The Beginnings of the Workers' Movement

The political weight of the Netherlands in the international workers' movement around the time of the First World-War may seem out of all proportion to the country's weak industrial development and the crushing dominance of agriculture in her economy.

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4 Peter Struve (1870–1943) was one of those Russian liberals who at the end of the nineteenth century developed a passion for Marxism, which he saw as no more than a theory of the peaceful transition from feudalism to industrial capitalism. Their brand of 'Marxism', known as 'legal' Marxism because it was tolerated and even encouraged by the tsarist censorship, was an apology for 'modern capitalism'. Struve soon became one of the leaders of the liberal Cadet party (Constitutional Democrats, or КД) and was in the front ranks of the White counter-revolution after 1917.

The workers' movement was initially a movement of artisans and of workers from small, workshop-type enterprises, with an important role being played by the cigar-makers and the diamond-workers (who formed a Jewish proletariat in Amsterdam). The 'Dutch' working class properly-speaking – namely, those coming from rural backgrounds – was still extremely small in the mid-nineteenth century. The proletariat was, to a large extent, of Jewish or German origin. This at least partly explains its great openness to Marxism. But for decades, the country's belated industrial development contributed to the survival of artisan-labour and its archaic characteristics, making the Netherlands a choice terrain for anarchism.

Up until 1843, the social movements remained very limited, taking the form of explosive revolts which could not, in themselves, adopt any conscious goals. The demonstrations of the Amsterdam unemployed and the hunger-march in The Hague in 1847 were not yet clear expressions of working-class consciousness, given the absence of a developed and concentrated proletariat. During the 1848 revolution, the demonstrations and looting which took place in Amsterdam were the expression of a true *Lumpenproletariat*, their desperate actions foreign to any proletariat which has become conscious and therefore organised.

The first forms of proletarian organisation in the Netherlands directly expressed the international nature of the emerging workers' movement. In 1847, German workers created a Communist Club which was active amongst the Dutch-speaking proletariat.<sup>5</sup> One year later, the Communist League, which had several sections in the Netherlands, illegally introduced copies of the first edition of the *Communist Manifesto*, fresh from the printers. But for twenty years, these first steps by the Marxist movement were not followed up, since there was no real industrial development until the 1870s. The Dutch section of the International Workingmen's Association (IWMA) remained under the influence of anarchist and syndicalist ideas (the Dutch Workers' League was formed in 1871). In 1872, at the Hague Congress, the Dutch delegates rallied to the positions of Bakunin. Nonetheless, one of them – the tailor Hendrik Gerhard (1829–86) – was to be one of the precursors and founders of the Social-Democratic movement.

It was growing industrialisation, encouraged by the influx of German capital after Prussia's victory over France, that finally allowed the Dutch socialist

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5 'Vereeniging tot zedelijke beschaving van de arbeidende klasse'. This Association was in touch with the German workers' Communist League, based in London. The first complete Dutch translation of the *Communist Manifesto* was published in The Hague in 1892. This (inaccurate) translation was produced by Christiaan Cornelissen. Herman Gorter authored a new (and better) translation, published in Amsterdam in 1904.

movement to develop. The preferential treatment accorded to Dutch manufacturers in imports from the Netherlands' Indonesian colony before 1874 had been crucial to the development of the Dutch textile-industry, which concentrated thousands of proletarians in industrial centres like Leiden and Twente.<sup>6</sup>

In 1878, the Social-Democratic Association (*Sociaal Democratische Vereeniging*) was established in Amsterdam, and this soon led to the formation of local groups (in The Hague, Rotterdam and Haarlem) that saw their task as leading the class-struggle. In 1881, these workers' associations united, assuming the name Social-Democratic Union (*Sociaal Democratische Bond*). Its first secretary was Gerhard, who had been secretary of the IWMA's section in the Netherlands.

### 3 Domela Nieuwenhuis, the SDB and the SDAP

Ferdinand Domela Nieuwenhuis (1846–1919), a former pastor converted to socialism, was the leading personality in the formative years of the Dutch workers' movement. At the time, Domela Nieuwenhuis was not yet an anarchist, and led major campaigns for universal suffrage. His movement's activities consisted of leading strikes and helping to set up trades-unions. The periodical *Recht voor Allen* ('Right for All') – which was established in 1879 and emerged as the organ of the *Sociaal Democratische Bond* – encouraged agitation amongst workers' groups. Its activities were varied: distribution of leaflets in the factories and barracks, the education of the proletariat through courses on Marxism, demonstrations and meetings against the army, the Church, the monarchy, alcoholism and the classist justice-system. Repression soon rained down on the young workers' movement. Not only was Domela Nieuwenhuis arrested and condemned to a year in jail, but for the first time in its history the Dutch police-force was armed, and could be assisted by the military 'in case of a conflict'. The police had the right to intervene in public meetings, to dissolve such meetings and to arrest socialist speakers.

Domela Nieuwenhuis regarded himself as a disciple of Marx and Engels and kept up a sustained correspondence with the theoreticians of scientific socialism.<sup>7</sup> But though they followed the development of the socialist movement in the Netherlands with obvious sympathy, Marx and Engels had many reservations about the immediately 'revolutionist' conceptions of Domela Nieuwen-

6 Caljé and Den Hollander 1995.

7 'Marx-Engels-Nachlass', Letter from Domela Nieuwenhuis to Karl Marx, 28 March 1882.

huis. Marx warned against 'doctrinaire' views which sought to draw up plans for 'a programme of action for the first day after the revolution'. The overturning of society could not be a 'dream about the world to come'. On the contrary,

The doctrinaire and necessarily fantastic anticipations of the programme of action for a revolution of the future only divert us from the struggle of the present. The dream that the end of the world was at hand inspired the early Christians in their struggle with the Roman Empire and gave them confidence in victory. Scientific insight into the inevitable disintegration of the dominant order of society continually proceeding before our eyes, and the ever-growing passion into which the masses are scourged by the old ghosts of government – while at the same time the positive development of the means of production advances with gigantic strides – all this is a sufficient guarantee that with the moment of the outbreak of a real proletarian revolution there will also be given the conditions (though these are certain not to be idyllic) of its next immediate *modus operandi*.<sup>8</sup>

Domela Nieuwenhuis's importance in the Netherlands lies not only in his activity as an agitator and organiser of the working class. He was the first socialist to publish an abridged version of Marx's *Capital*. This being said, he was far from being a Marxist theoretically. His numerous writings reveal a theoretical eclecticism, combining social humanism and ethical idealism with a persistent attachment to the Christianity of the nation's founding fathers. A propagandist for atheism and 'freethinker'-groups had a considerable echo in the early Dutch and German workers' movements – Domela Nieuwenhuis was actually a prophet to the emerging Dutch working class. Profoundly marked by Christian ideals, the proletariat readily adopted Domela Nieuwenhuis's apocalyptic style and his eclectic mix of ethical, utopian, and eschatological ideas. Domela Nieuwenhuis symbolised the slow and confused emergence of a still-young proletariat, imbued with the Christian spirit.

Nonetheless, during the 1880s Domela Nieuwenhuis remained a party-man within the Social-Democratic Union (SDB), which renamed itself the Social-Democratic Party (SDP) in 1884. Like the German Social Democrats, he remained a convinced supporter of the parliamentary strategy, as a revolutionary tribune for the emerging workers' movement. The party was very popular among manual workers (*Met de vereelte vuist*, 'With the calloused fist'); ninety

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8 Marx 1992.

percent of its members were proletarians. It also had a considerable influence among the small peasants in the north of the country. Between 1888 and 1891, Domela Nieuwenhuis was elected to Parliament by the Friesland smallholders, though not without making an alliance with the People's Party of Friesland (*Friesche Volkspartij*), a strange amalgam of populists, regionalists, and socialists. In three years as a socialist deputy he used Parliament to campaign for reforms: social security, independence for the colonies, abolition of wages in kind and of child-labour, the struggle against unemployment, separation of Church and state, nationalisation of the land, public works, and so on. SDB propaganda met with such success amongst the workers that by 1893 the party had 6,000 members.<sup>9</sup>

By 1891, however, Domela Nieuwenhuis began to reject parliamentarism and became the only anti-parliamentary Social-Democratic leader within the Second International, which was founded in 1889. This brought him considerably closer to anarchist positions. His evolution can be explained by the upsurge of class-struggle during the 1890s, both in the Netherlands and other countries, leading to the numerical growth of the organised workers' movement. Under the pressure of a cyclical crisis, reflected in the growth of unemployment, disturbances began to erupt. In the Netherlands workers clashed with the police, who had been supporting the gangs of thugs involved in attacking and burning SDB branch-offices. In this apocalyptic climate, which gave rise to hopes that the 'final struggle' was near, Domela Nieuwenhuis and the SDB's militants began to have doubts in the effectiveness of parliamentary tactics, which seemed to them in contradiction with the struggle for revolution.

This calling-into-question of parliamentarism was not restricted to the Dutch party. The 1890s saw the development both of an anarcho-sindicalist opposition and of an opposition within international Social Democracy which rejected any kind of parliamentary activity. The dominance of the parliamentary faction over parties like the German Social Democracy and the concomitant growth of opportunist tendencies within those parties, explain why some of their new adherents rebelled against the party-leadership. Those who called themselves the 'Youth' (*Jungen*) in Germany, whose example was followed in countries like Belgium, Sweden and Denmark, were to be at the head of this anti-parliamentary revolt, which remained ambiguous in character. While it denounced the gangrene of reformism in the parliamentary leaderships, it also

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9 See A. De Jong 1966. There are also elements in J.-Y. Bériou's preface to the 1975 reprint of Domela Nieuwenhuis 1897, which has a foreword by Élisée Reclus.



made a series of concessions to anarchistic, anticentralist, individualist tendencies, fuelled by 'messianic' hopes and the mystique of 'propaganda by the deed'. The examples of Germany and Belgium are particularly significant.

In Germany, 1879 (in the middle of the period of Bismarck's 'anti-socialist laws' banning the Social-Democratic Party) saw the formation of an opposition based on the newspaper *Freiheit*, organised around Johann Most (1846–1906) – later to become the 'grand old man' of American anarchism – and Wilhelm Hasselmann (1844–1916). This eclectic opposition, inspired by the ideas of Dühring and Blanqui, protested against the 'leaders' legalistic tactics' and advocated a conspiratorial strategy. It argued that the 'epoch of parliamentary chatter' was over, and that the 'period of action' was about to begin. This opposition was expelled in 1880, and quickly moved towards anarchism and 'propaganda by the deed'. In 1885, it was succeeded by the *Jungen*, based on Berlin's students and bohemian intellectual milieu. Led by Max Schippel (1859–1928), Conrad Schmidt (1863–1932), Ignaz Auer (1846–1907), and later by Georg von Vollmar (1850–1922), it revolted against the 'dictatorship' of the parliamentary faction, and in 1886 boycotted the Berlin local elections. It denounced the 'petty-bourgeois and state-socialist influence' in the Social-Democratic Party. Above all, it proposed the replacement of a centralised organisation with the 'formation of autonomous – in other words, independent – groups, in which the centralist principle is completely abandoned'. In 1891, the split became final. The *Jungen* created the federalist Association of Independent Socialists (*Ver ein Unabhängiger Sozialisten*). Like the anarchists, they developed the idea of the 'individualisation of the worker' and advocated the tactics of 'pure class-struggle', along with a vigorous antiparliamentarism. Initially hostile to anarchism, most of the Association's members – like Gustav Landauer (1870–1919) – moved towards this current. The organisation broke up in 1894, most of its militants returning to the SPD. Its leaders, such as Max Schippel and Georg von Vollmar, were soon to become spokespersons for revisionism. There were certainly similarities between the German *Jungen* and the Domela Nieuwenhuis current. Ideologically, they prefigured the anti-centralist and anti-political form of council-communism.<sup>10</sup>

In Belgium, the economic crisis affecting the whole of Europe in 1886 gave rise to violent workers' riots. The general strike spread spontaneously, like wildfire, especially in the French-speaking region (Wallonia). In an atmosphere of intense social struggle, a current formed within the Belgian Workers' Party

10 See Bock 1975, pp. 38–73. See also the introduction by Roger Dangeville to Marx and Engels 1975.

(*Parti Ouvrier Belge* – POB) that called for direct action. In 1887, Alfred Defuisseaux's group left the POB to form the Republican Socialist Party (PSR), which, although in favour of universal suffrage – unlike the *Jungen* – proclaimed itself the champion of the insurrectionary strike. Its ideology was coloured by Blanquism: calls for minority violence, through the use of 'petrol and dynamite'. This dissident group had its base among the miners of the Borinage, and declared that 'the revolution is thundering at the gates'. Without either programme or perspectives, the group dissolved in 1889 and rejoined the POB. Its disappearance opened the way to a reformist and electoralist orientation within the POB, which pushed revolution into the background in favour of an electoral strategy focused on the demand for universal suffrage. This orientation was expressed concisely by Cesar de Paepe (1842–90): 'If we want universal suffrage, it is to avoid revolution, since reform or revolution, universal suffrage or universal upheaval, is the dilemma facing the Belgian people today.'<sup>11</sup>

In fact, the question facing the workers' movement of the day was whether the period was one that was immediately revolutionary, or whether, on the contrary, it was the beginning of a cycle of capitalist growth implying an activity of organising workers into unions and of electoral agitation. On this question, Domela Nieuwenhuis and the *Jungen* in Germany crystallised an impatience which was all the more vigorous because it was fed by large social movements and opposed to the strongly reformist tendencies within emerging Social Democracy.

The idea of 'direct action' found widespread support within the SDB. It is highly significant that Johan Schaper (1868–1934), a future leader of the revisionist current, proposed to the SDB's 1898 congress that the party should put aside money for weapons, and that the delegates should practice using revolvers between sessions of the congress! Shortly before the split, all the future revisionist leaders of the SDAP adopted an extremely radical attitude: Henri Hubert van Kol (1852–1925), still a personal friend of Domela Nieuwenhuis, expressed anti-parliamentary views, and made inflammatory declarations in favour of revolution 'by violent civil war alone'. In 1894, Pieter Jelles Troelstra (1860–1930) declared himself unconditionally in favour of violence. All these inflammatory declarations, especially those of Schaper, led to the SDB being banned by the government in 1894. The party changed its name to the *Socialistenbond* ('Socialist Union').<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> De Paepe 1890, p. 10.

<sup>12</sup> A. De Jong 1966, pp. 35–40.

However, this 'radicalism' of Domela Nieuwenhuis and the SDB, which was more verbal than real, led to the party's increasing isolation within the international Social-Democratic movement. In the Second International, Domela Nieuwenhuis insisted more and more on the anarchist idea of the general strike. In 1891, he argued in support of the tactic of a general strike of workers in the belligerent countries in the event of war breaking out. His motion was rejected in favour of one proposed by Wilhelm Liebknecht (father of Karl), emphasising the capitalist roots of militarism. His insistence on the general strike, which was made to appear as a universal panacea for the revolution, pushed into the background an essential idea that was later taken up by the Marxist left: their rejection of the distinction between defensive and offensive war. At the 1893 Zürich congress, Domela Nieuwenhuis's proposal of a general strike, together with a strike in the ranks of the army and even a women's strike, showed that he had, in fact, gone over to anarchism. The resolution adopted by the congress required the rejection of all military credits, and the struggle for disarmament and the abolition of standing armies. It demonstrated that the Social-Democratic International was far from being the 'petty and middle-bourgeois' organisation that Domela Nieuwenhuis claimed it was. In fact, the Zürich congress showed that the fault-line lay between the Marxists, who accepted the need for political organisation and proletarian action, and the anarchists, who rejected it in practice, if not in theory. The congress made it a condition for membership of the International that member parties, unions, or associations should 'recognise the necessity of workers' organisation and political action'.

The question of participation in elections as a means of Social-Democratic political action ultimately split the SDB. Following the electoral reform in the Dutch Constitution of 1887, sixty percent of males could take part in the elections, and obtaining seats in Parliament thus became a more tangible possibility. At the 1893 Groningen Congress, Domela Nieuwenhuis proposed a resolution unconditionally rejecting all electoral activity. It was accepted by a small majority: 47 in favour, 40 against, with 14 abstentions. The Marxist Frank van der Goes (1859–1939), who had led the opposition to Domela Nieuwenhuis, was expelled from the party. Troelstra then took the initiative, with the support of the leaders of the German Social Democrats, in organising socialist electoral societies, parallel to the SDB and ignoring the congress-resolution. A split became inevitable.

In 1894, a group of SDB leaders and militants – known ironically by their opponents as the 'twelve apostles' – including Troelstra, Van der Goes, Schaper, Van Kol and Vliegen – took the initiative in forming the Social-Democratic Workers' Party, the SDAP (*Sociaal Democratische Arbeiders Partij*), on the basis

of the programme of German Social Democracy.<sup>13</sup> At first, the SDAP looked like a small sect: it had fewer than a hundred members in 1894 and 600 in 1895, of whom barely 250 came from the SDB. For a long time, the party seemed to the more politicised workers to be a 'splitting' exercise, led by a few middle-class 'gentlemen' (*Heeren*). The SDAP was, indeed, largely made up of intellectuals from the middle-class. Its electoral basis was not the industrial workers, who remained faithful to the SDB, but the small farmers and farm-workers of Friesland. For most workers within the SDB, the split appeared confusing and premature.

The split caused confusion, both because the minority faction left the party without trying to convince the majority of their positions, and because it did so solely in order to take part in the elections following the recent adoption of a law widening the electoral register. With the exception of Frank van der Goes, who was an orthodox Marxist, the SDAP leadership went into the elections with reformist and electoralist reservations which boded ill for the future – and this despite the fact that they had only recently been playing the game of verbal extremism inside the SDB. In 1895, Troelstra declared at a party-meeting that his aim was 'above all, to form an organised workers' movement which can take its place, as an autonomous party, *alongside those of the bourgeoisie*'.<sup>14</sup>

Finally, the split was a premature one. A growing minority of the SDB, shortly to become the majority, was coming around to the electoral strategy. In 1897, the SDB – the largest workers' party, with 2,000 militants – put up candidates, gaining several seats on the town-councils and even one Member of Parliament. This new orientation, which marked the separation with the anti-

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13 The 'twelve apostles' (*twalf apostelen*) were: Levie Cohen (1864–1930) (Zwolle), shop-keeper; Jan Antoon Fortuijn (1855–1940) (Amsterdam), clerk, future publisher of the theoretical periodical *De Nieuwe Tijd*; Adrien H. Gerhard (1858–1948) (Amsterdam), school-master, son of the founder of the IWMA in Holland; Frank van der Goes (1859–1939) (Amsterdam), writer; Willem Pieter Gerardus Helsdingen (1850–1921) (Rotterdam), weaver; Hendrikus Hubertus van der Kol (1852–1925) (Aywaille), engineer; Henri Polak (1863–1943) (Amsterdam), diamond-cutter; Johan Hendrik Andries Schaper (1868–1934) (Groningen), house-painter; Hendrik Spiekman (1874–1917) (Sappemeer), type-setter; Pieter Jelles Troelstra (1860–1930) (Utrecht), lawyer; Helmig Jan van der Vegt (1864–1944) (Zwolle), teacher; Willem Hubert Vliegen (1862–1947) (Maastricht), type-setter. The leadership was not made up solely of 'gentlemen', as the anarchists claimed at the time. Many were workers. None were to join the Tribunist movement: all were or became revisionists. The nickname of 'apostles' is illustrative of a general mentality moulded by an omnipresent Christianity. Almost all were editors of local Social-Democratic newspapers. The SDB press later passed into the control of the SDAP.

14 Troelstra 1933, p. 137.

electoral anarchist current, rendered the SDB's separate existence pointless. The SDB was shaken to the core by the loss of its militants, who left to join either the SDAP or the libertarian current. In June 1900 it decided to dissolve itself, and its remaining 200 militants decided to join the SDAP and accept the programme of the Second International.

The evolution of the SDB – known as the '*Socialistenbond*' after 1894 – was no accident. It was made easier by the 1897 departure of Domela Nieuwenhuis and his supporters, who declared themselves to be anarchists. The latter abandoned the organised workers' movement: in 1896, Domela Nieuwenhuis walked out of the London Congress of the International, when the latter decided to exclude the anarchists from forthcoming congresses.

Domela Nieuwenhuis's split proved still-born. Together with Christiaan Cornelissen (1864–1943) – one of the future theoreticians of European revolutionary syndicalism – he founded the newspaper *De Vrije Socialist* ('Free Socialist'), and a short-lived organisation: the Federation of Libertarian-Socialists (*Federatie van Vrije Socialisten*). But with the formation of a socialist movement in the Netherlands, the role played by 'political' anarchism faded into the background. Dutch anarchism became almost exclusively syndicalist, with a strong influence on economic struggles. In 1893, on the initiative of Cornelissen and the SDB, the 'National Labour-Secretariat' (*Nationaal Arbeids Secretariaat*, or NAS) was formed. As in France, anarchism took refuge in the unions. But Cornelissen split with Domela Nieuwenhuis, who remained reticent about union-activity, and, under his influence, the NAS increasingly turned towards revolutionary syndicalism rather than anarcho-syndicalism. Exiled to France, from 1900 onwards Cornelissen became one of the theorists of the revolutionary-syndicalist wing of the CGT. Indeed, the NAS played an important part in the Dutch workers' movement, despite its limited membership. It was to symbolise the militant attitude necessary to the development of the class-struggle in its economic form. This was unlike the Social-Democratic union, the NVV ('Dutch Confederation of Trades-Unions'), created by the SDAP in 1905 to counter the influence of the NAS, and often to oppose or even sabotage the workers' strikes (see below). The NAS played a decisive role in all the great strikes, especially the 1903 general strike in the transport-industry (see below). Little-by-little, the NAS moved closer to the radical Marxist current, to the point where at times it looked like the union-organisation of the Tribunist current, then of the Communist Party after 1920, and subsequently of Sneevliet's RSAP from 1927 to 1940.

#### 4 Domela Nieuwenhuis and the Roots of 'Councilism'

Ferdinand Domela Nieuwenhuis's evolution towards anarchist positions does not alter the fact that he was a precursor and organiser of the emerging workers' movement in the Netherlands. He remains a great figure of the international workers' movement, in an epoch when Marxists and anarchists could coexist within the same organisation. Active against the threat of war, he was more a pacifist and anti-militarist than he was a revolutionary guided by a coherent theory. Unlike anarchist leaders such as Kropotkin, Cornelissen and Jean Grave who put themselves at the service of imperialist war, supporting the Allied camp<sup>15</sup> during the First World-War, Domela Nieuwenhuis remained an internationalist. It is no surprise that at his funeral in November 1919, when a hundred thousand Amsterdam workers followed the cortege, the Communist International was officially represented by S.J. Rutgers, one of the leaders of the Dutch Communist Party and a member of the Comintern's Executive.

In the 1920s, Gorter summed up the left-communist position with regard to Domela Nieuwenhuis, when he said that his activity was out of step with the period in which he lived, since this was not yet a period of revolution but still one of reforms, of capitalism's evolution and not its decline:

In a period of evolution, which was just beginning in the Netherlands, he already wanted the revolution. Throughout his life he remained faithful to revolutionary anarchism, and lived, understood, and admired the Russian Revolution. The difference between him and us Marxist revolutionaries is that we are for revolutionary methods in a period of revolution, while he wanted them prematurely.<sup>16</sup>

It is, nonetheless, necessary to understand the limitations of Domela Nieuwenhuis's contribution, because for the anarchist and councilist currents he has become a symbol of the impossibility of remaining in the Second International, which is seen as bourgeois from the outset. It is thus important to evaluate the criticisms that Domela Nieuwenhuis made of German Social Democracy and

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15 The *Manifeste des Seize* ('Manifesto of the Sixteen'), 1916. This declaration was signed by 15 anarchists, and first published on 28 February 1916. The complete list of signatories was: Christiaan Cornelissen, Henri Fuss, Jean Grave, Jacques Guérin, Pierre Kropotkin, A. Laisant, François Le Lève (Lorient, France), Charles Malato, Jules Moineau (Liège, Belgium), A. Orfila, Hussein Dey (Algeria), Marc Pierrot, Paul Reclus, Richard (Algeria), Tchikawa (Japan) and Warlaam (Varlan) Tcherkesoff.

16 Gorter 1922, pp. 16–20.

the Second International. These remain valid to the extent that they concurred with Engels's critique of opportunism in the German party. In 1891, Engels emphasised the danger of opportunism in the ranks of Social Democracy when he wrote in his *Critique* of the draft-Erfurt programme:

This forgetting of the great, the principal considerations for the momentary interests of the day, this struggling and striving for the success of the moment regardless of later consequences, this sacrifice of the future of the movement for its present may be 'honestly' meant, but it is and remains opportunism, and 'honest' opportunism is perhaps the most dangerous of all ...<sup>17</sup>

In his book *Socialism in Danger*, published in French in Paris in 1897 at the time of his departure from the *Socialistenbond*, Domela Nieuwenhuis denounced the crucial weaknesses of the Social Democrats, which were to crystallise in the revisionist theories of Vollmar and Bernstein from 1895 onwards. Domela Nieuwenhuis's criticisms were the following:

- the party's penetration by petty-bourgeois elements endangered its proletarian character, and manifested itself in ideological concessions to the bourgeoisie, particularly during elections;
- the theory of 'state-socialism' deformed its revolutionary goal, by defining the revolution as not much more than the reformist take-over of the state by the workers' movement: '... the Social Democrats are just reformers who want to transform today's society along the lines of state socialism'.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Engels 1990, p. 217.

<sup>18</sup> Nieuwenhuis 1975, p. 176. Reprint with a foreword by J.-Y. Bériou.

Bériou's post-face gives a 'modernist' interpretation of the historical period of the Second International. According to him, the proletariat was and remains a 'class for capital'. All workers' movements integrate the class into capitalism: 'The "workers movement" is the adequate expression of the movement of value ... the workers' movement is the expression of the movement of variable capital, of the proletariat as an economic class'. Bériou rejects all political activity and all parties, declaring that: 'The Second International corresponded to counter-revolutionary conditions, to the development of capitalism'. He draws the conclusion that the communist left should not have remained within the Second International: 'One of the great weaknesses of the re-emerging communist movement of around 1905 (Trotsky, Pannekoek, Luxemburg, and so on) was its incomprehension of the nature of social democracy'.

Unlike the Marxists, Domela Nieuwenhuis came to the conclusion that the workers should abandon the struggle for reforms: 'All reforms only serve to reinforce the existing state of affairs'. He also thought that the evolution of Social Democracy would lead inevitably to integration into the bourgeoisie: 'the triumph of Social Democracy will be the defeat of socialism'.<sup>19</sup>

It was no accident that Domela Nieuwenhuis's denunciation of Social Democracy as 'bourgeois' should be taken up not only by the anarchists, but also by the 'councilists'. The latter believed that 'Social Democracy should be considered as the most consistent among the advanced fractions of the bourgeoisie', and that 'in reality Social Democracy did not *become* a bourgeois reformist party; it was one right from the start'.<sup>20</sup>

But in the light of history, the scope of Domela Nieuwenhuis's critique remained limited. He represented an anarchist, religious, even Tolstoyan tendency which was very marked in the Dutch workers' movement and which was to survive up until the First World-War. It was fed by pacifism and anti-militarism. In denying the need for class violence – necessary for the seizure of power by the proletariat – and of a dictatorship of the proletariat over the bourgeois minority, Domela Nieuwenhuis broke definitively with the Marxism which he had helped to introduce into the Netherlands, and evolved towards a sort of Tolstoyism: 'The anarchist-communists call for the abolition of political authority, in other words the state, because they deny the right of one class or individual to dominate another class or individual. Tolstoy has expressed this so perfectly that there is nothing more to be said.'<sup>21</sup>

Those who – like the anarchists, but also the 'councilists' – refer back to Domela Nieuwenhuis in order to argue that the Second International and the Social-Democratic parties were 'bourgeois' from the beginning, deny certain historically obvious facts:

- The Second International was the place where the advanced layers of workers in the main industrial concentrations were educated and tempered, leaving behind the artisan-characteristics they still retained during the period of the First International, characteristics that explain the peculiar weight of individualist anarchism in their ranks. It was through this Second International, which educated the workers in the principle of internationalism – and whose complete collapse in 1914 would have been difficult to predict at

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19 Gorter 1922.

20 Nieuwenhuis 1975.

21 Nieuwenhuis 1975 pp. 42, 62, 88–9, 95, 176, 180–81 and 186 (for the quotations).



the time – that the socialist proletariat developed numerically and qualitatively, both within Europe and outside it;

- It was within the International that resistance developed against revisionism and opportunism. It was because the International before 1914 was far from moribund that the Marxist left was able to develop within it and to combat the right and the centre. It was within the International that early basic Marxism, as embodied by Bebel and even Kautsky, was enriched by the contributions of Luxemburg, Pannekoek, and so on. No 'proletarian tendency' could have emerged from an already completely 'bourgeois organism'.
- It was federalism, not centralism that ended up undermining the International, to the point of transforming it into a mere sum of national sections. This was the basis for the development of the outrageous power of the parliamentary cliques that eventually came to dominate the parties, for example in Germany and the Netherlands. The dictatorship of parliamentary groups, which had become autonomous from the party's authority, was the corollary of anti-centralist federalism in the International. In fact, from the outset, the 1889 Congress declared that 'in no case and under no pressure can the relations [between parties] violate the autonomy of national groupings, these being the best judges of the tactics to be adopted in their own country'. In 1907, even Camille Huysmans, the leader of the ISB, recommended the 'substitution of the federal principle for the principle of out-and-out centralisation'. In fact, the Marxist left was to struggle constantly for strict centralisation and the national sections' respect for the discipline of the International, against the wishes of the parliamentary and revisionist leaders. All the left-groupings (the Bolsheviks, Luxemburg's Polish SDKPiL, the Tribunist left, and, from 1912, Bordiga's tendency within the Italian Socialist Party) fought for respect of the principles, resolutions, and decisions of a centralised International.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, it is true that in the hands of the

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22 See Haupt 1964. It is significant that the International Socialist Bureau (ISB), which was in principle the International's ruling body, was only formed in 1900. It had few, if any, directing functions. Haupt notes that 'The German party, much the most influential, contested the utility of transforming the Bureau into a ruling organ, and consistently expressed reservations over any attempt to widen the Bureau's competences.' The same was true in all but the most revolutionary sections. For example, Edouard Vaillant of the French Socialist Party declared that 'The ISB is above all a co-ordinating, not a leading body' (1910). Even Rosa Luxemburg saw the decisions of the Second International as having only a moral authority: 'the authority of the International Congress is moral, but it is immense'. She did, however, propose that the decisions of the International Congresses should be made binding.

revisionists, centralism was to become a formidable weapon *against* the left: this was to be the bitter experience of the Dutch Tribunists and the German left around Rosa Luxemburg from 1909 onwards.

## 5      **The Beginnings of the SDAP – The Three Marxist Generations – Troelstra and the Right of the Party**

None of the leaders of the Dutch left, Gorter and Pannekoek included, would ever have defined Dutch Social Democracy as ‘bourgeois’, even after the split in 1909, and even as late as 1920. In 1922, Gorter, with hindsight, observed that Marxism and revolution presided over the beginnings of the SDAP:

... [R]eally, the beginning was good. At the beginning of the 1890s, a real revolutionary propaganda was set in motion, both outside and inside Parliament. We said publicly and clearly: ‘we want reforms, but you will only get them through a revolutionary attitude. By constantly aiming for the violent annihilation of capitalism; because you yourselves must constantly defend your rights’. Reforms and revolution together – that was the slogan.<sup>23</sup>

In its early days, between 1890 and 1900, the SDAP attracted the best Marxist elements. A whole constellation of intellectuals broke with the bourgeoisie and joined the party on the basis of its revolutionary positions. Their contribution to both the Dutch and the international revolutionary movement proved considerable. There were three generations of Marxists, of which the last two represented the basis for the formation of the Dutch communist left. Emblematic of this series of generations are names like Frank van der Goes, Herman Gorter, Henriëtte Roland Holst, Anton Pannekoek, David Wijnkoop, Jan Ceton, and Willem van Ravesteyn, to mention only the best known. That much of it was composed of artists, writers, and scientists who were of huge importance in the cultural history of the Netherlands, especially among those of the second generation, is a striking feature of this Marxist left.

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23      Gorter 1922, pp. 16–20. See the Dutch council-communist periodical *Daad en Gedachte* (‘Act and Thought’), Nos. 1 and 2, January and February 1984, ‘Over een povere en over een wezenlijke kritiek op de sociaal-democratie’. See also *Daad en Gedachte* 1990, a pamphlet whose title translates as ‘Was Social Democracy Ever Socialist?’. The periodical ceased publication in 1998, although the group remained alive. The pamphlet was originally written by Jaap Meulenkamp (1917–98).

Frank van der Goes (1859–1939), one of the first to introduce Marxism into the Netherlands, was a major figure. It was he who trained Troelstra in Marxism (to little effect, it is true!) and, more importantly, Gorter and Roland Holst. His trajectory is especially symptomatic. This aristocrat 'in mind and heart', to use Pannekoek's words, gave the appearance of a 'gentleman' who had wandered into a workers' movement from which all his circumstances seemed to separate him. An insurance-broker and writer by profession, he began as a member of the Liberal Party and a bourgeois reformer. He drew closer to the socialist movement bit-by-bit through his literary criticism. He made his mark as one of the 'leaders' of the literary movement of the 1880s (known as the *tachtigers*), of which Gorter was also a prominent figure. In 1885, he founded the artistic periodical *De Nieuwe Gids* ('The New Guide'), an anti-conformist review for the 'liberation' of literature and society from all conservatism. In 1890, he joined the SDB, to become leader of the group opposed to Domela Nieuwenhuis and the representative of a tendency seeking at all costs to form a social-democratic party by splitting from the SDB without first conducting an internal struggle. His main contribution to Marxism was to translate Volume I of Marx's *Capital*, and, above all, in 1893 founding, with his own money, the Marxist periodical *De Nieuwe Tijd* ('Modern Times'), the organ of the Marxist left until December 1921. In May 1896, it became the periodical of the SDAP, modelled on Kautsky's *Neue Zeit*. Its editors, along with Van der Goes, were Gorter, Roland Holst, and Pieter Wiedijk<sup>24</sup>, who was later to become editorial secretary and to turn it into the theoretical organ of Tribunism (see below).

Herman Gorter (1864–1927) belonged to a second generation of Marxists. This son of a Calvinist pastor was certainly the greatest poet of his time. After writing a thesis on Aeschylus, he gained indubitable notoriety by the 1889 publication of his symbolist and idealist poem *May*, which was to remain his most famous. After a spiritual crisis which led him towards a kind of pantheism – inspired by Spinoza's *Ethics*, which he translated from Latin into Dutch – Gorter broke with the literary movement of his generation, and began to study Marx and Kautsky. In 1897, he became an enthusiastic member of the SDAP. Very dynamic and a remarkable orator, Gorter was, above all, a good populariser of

24 Pieter Wiedijk (1867–1938) – *nom de plume*: J. Saks – was a pharmacist who joined the SDB in 1892, then the SDAP. Editorial secretary of *De Nieuwe Tijd* (1902–13); member of the Tribunist SDP from 1909 to 1915. See A. De Jong 1954 and Kalshoven 1990. Despite abandoning the SDP, Wiedijk remained active. During the 1930s, he collaborated with Sneevliet and Henriëtte Roland Holst on the monthly periodical *De Nieuwe Weg*. A literary critic by profession, he has left very critical memoirs of Troelstra's SDAP and the Tribunist SDP: Wiedijk 1977.

Marxism, which he represented in a very lively manner easily accessible to the great majority of workers. More than Pannekoek, who was much more a theoretician, it was Gorter who embodied Marxism for Dutch socialist workers. Thanks to his translations, he allowed wider access to some of the works of Marx and Kautsky, and, after the War, to Lenin's *State and Revolution*. Today, literary critics cite him as the writer of *May*, 'forgetting' his political dimension, but Gorter was, above all else, a convinced militant, wholeheartedly won-over to the revolutionary cause. In 1889, he demonstrated his sense of organisation by founding the Bussum section of the party, becoming its chair. He devoted himself to all the activities of the socialist movement: in the trades-unions and during elections (standing repeatedly for the SDAP and later the SDP), at party-congresses, and through his interventions in strikes. As a party-propagandist, he taught courses on Marxism to the textile-workers in Twente, a region in the eastern Netherlands. Before 1914, Gorter was, above all, an agitator, an organiser, and a propagandist in the service of his party, surpassing the other Dutch Marxists in these respects.<sup>25</sup>

More theoretical than Gorter and less practical as well, Anton Pannekoek to this day embodies the truly international dimension of the Marxist left. He was the least 'Dutch' of his generation. After studying astronomy, where he gained an international reputation – to the point where this eclipsed his activity as a Marxist theoretician between 1920 and 1960 – Pannekoek (1873–1960) became politically committed.<sup>26</sup> But for this son of a liberal businessman, the first political home had been not socialism, but bourgeois liberalism. In early 1899, he had become a member of the electoral committee in Leiden, where he worked as an astronomer at the Observatory. After extensive read-

25 See De Liagre Böhl 1973 and 1996. For his militant-activity in the Bussum section, see Pacifistisch Socialistische Partij 1977.

26 See Pannekoek 1982, *Herinneringen*, with an introduction by B.A. Sijes, an old member of the GIC who published Pannekoek's memoirs, written in 1944. In 1903, his attitude was already a radical one. In an intervention at a big workers' meeting in Leiden, he proposed a successful resolution demanding that 'the workers must block by all means possible the criminal laws'. Under threat of being sacked, he was summoned by Kuyper, the head of the government, whose attention had been drawn to Pannekoek's articles. After a general discussion on Marxism and his articles, Pannekoek succeeded in getting Kuyper to agree that there should be no hindrance to 'a civil servant freely expressing his political opinions'. However, he was not 'to enter into conflict with the law, on pain of losing his job'. These threats did not prevent Pannekoek from writing constantly against the 'law and the bourgeois state' (pp. 91–2), especially in the form of theoretical contributions. Pannekoek, in the name of the Dutch Marxists, answered the anti-Marxist theses of the left-liberal leader M.W.F. Treub (1858–1931) in a contradictory debate: see Pannekoek 1908, p. 8.

ing of utopian authors, but also, more importantly, extensive discussions with Social-Democratic militants, Pannekoek broke off all contact with his bourgeois milieu. In July 1899, he joined the local SDAP section, where he quickly became chair, secretary and treasurer. He helped to form a workers' union. Throwing himself into militant activity, he was quick to take on responsibilities, and in 1900 represented the section at the SDAP's Rotterdam Congress. The section was still largely composed of the intellectuals who, in 1907, were to form the Tribunist movement: Mendels, J.A.N. Knuttel, and W. van Ravesteyn.<sup>27</sup> Like Gorter and Roland Holst, Pannekoek received his training in Marxism from Van der Goes – who introduced the trio to the work of Joseph Dietzgen – but also from Kautsky, who long remained their 'teacher'. Gifted with a rigorous mind thanks to his scientific and philosophical training, and with great clarity as a teacher, Pannekoek quickly became one of the main theoreticians of the international Marxist left, in both the Netherlands and Germany. Writing for *De Nieuwe Tijd*, and from 1903 for *Die Neue Zeit*, Pannekoek was at the heart of all the major debates in the Second International: on the question of the mass-strike, on the state, on the national question, on war (see Chapter Two). He was in many ways Rosa Luxemburg's equal in the sheer depth of his political thinking, and also influenced Lenin's *State and Revolution*. He was one of the first Marxists to take up the fight against emerging revisionism. His 'Kant's philosophy and Marxism', published in *De Nieuwe Tijd* in 1901, attacked the core of the revisionists' 'neo-Kantian philosophy', which transformed socialism from a weapon of revolutionary struggle into mere bourgeois ethics. Pannekoek was, certainly, more of a theoretician than he was an organiser, and his influence was felt above all in the realm of ideas; he was unable to contribute decisively to the organisational struggle against the revisionist majority in the SDAP. Nonetheless, Pannekoek remained an active militant. He participated fully in the life of the SDAP, intervening at congresses, and writing and distributing leaflets for his local section. Pannekoek's reputation as a 'pure theoretician' is hardly accurate, at least before 1921. He was no 'bookworm', but a brilliant party-propagandist, standing for Marxism against the Catholics on religion and against the liberals on the socialist project. He worked tirelessly in the great social movements

27 For Pannekoek's political activity in Leiden, see Malandrino 1982.

Maurits Mendels (1868–1944), was, like Pannekoek, a member of the Leiden Liberal electoral union. A journalist and lawyer, he joined the SDAP, and for a short time was a member of the SDP in 1909. He resigned, to return to the 'old party', and became a deputy, then a senator. Johannis Knuttel (1878–1965) was a famous philologist, and remained all his life in the Tribunist, then the Communist movement. In the CP, he was to follow all the twists and turns of Stalinist policy.

like the 1903 transport-strike, intervening in mass-meetings of workers. The proletarian cause mattered more to him than his job as an astronomer or the threats to his livelihood from the reactionary Kuyper government. But it was in Germany that Pannekoek really came into his own as an international – and internationalist – militant and theoretician.

Less well-known outside the Netherlands, the poet Henriëtte van der Schalk (1869–1952), the wife of the artist Richard Roland Holst (1868–1938), belonged to the same generation as Gorter, joining the SDAP together with him in 1897. She contributed powerfully to the history of the Dutch workers' movement and to the development of the theory of the mass-strike. The daughter of a notary public, she succeeded in breaking loose from her middle-class milieu and from the literary movement of the 1880s, to join the socialist movement. She was a remarkable socialist orator. She gained an international hearing during the early congresses of the International, first in Paris (1900), then in Amsterdam (1904), where she was given the task of presenting the congress-resolution on the general strike. A friend of Rosa Luxemburg, she was far from having the latter's rigour. She symbolised both 'centrist' hesitation faced with important moments of political decisions and splits, as well as a pure idealism, or even an incomplete break with her religious beginnings. When she left the workers' movement after 1927, her original Marxism quickly dissolved into the 'religious-socialist' movement, and she returned to her literary and poetical activities. Her political life began with Marx and ended with Tolstoy and Gandhi.<sup>28</sup>

The third generation of Marxists – also trained by Van der Goes – was less well-known, but bore enormous weight on the formation of the Tribunist movement. Its haste to form a new organisation, without having the patience to combat revisionism within the SDAP (see below), and its frequent political and theoretical confusions after 1914 (see Chapter Three), helped to tarnish the

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28 See Roland Holst 1949. She developed increasingly pacifist and religious ideas, in order to 'serve God inside mankind'. After breaking with Russian 'Communism' in 1925, she gave numerous contributions to religious-socialist periodicals (for instance, *Bevrijding*, organ of the *Bond van Religieuze Anarcho-Communisten* (BRAC), and *Tijd en Taak*). In 1948, she wrote a book in praise of Gandhi: *Een requiem voor Gandhi*, whilst also contributing to the jubilee of the Queen Wilhelmina: *Vijftig jaren. Officieel gedenkboek ter gelegenheid van het gouden regeringsjubileum van Hare Majesteit Koningin Wilhelmina ... 1898–31* (Amsterdam: Scheltens and Giltay). More interesting politically are her contributions on the mass-strike, written in 1905 and 1918, which still await translation into languages other than Dutch. See her major political work, *De revolutionaire massa-aktie. Een studie*. (Roland Holst 1918a).

image of the Marxist left, all of which was tarred with the same 'sectarian' brush. The most striking personalities were undoubtedly Wijnkoop, Van Ravesteyn, and Ceton, who stamped their undivided authority on first the Tribune, then (after 1918) the communist movements, as their real organisational leaders.

David Wijnkoop (1876–1941) quickly took the lead in the opposition to Troelstra. Son of a rabbi, and a graduate in literature, he abandoned the literary and student-movement to join the socialists. In 1900, two years after joining the SDAP, he was a delegate to the international socialist student-congress in Paris. He had a dynamic personality, with more of the fighter than the theoretician about him, and rose rapidly to join the leadership of the party (1905), drawing strong support from the combative Jewish proletariat of the Amsterdam III district.<sup>29</sup> Though courageous, he was dictatorial, sectarian, and something of a political operator. He was not well liked by either Pannekoek or Gorter, the latter seeing him during the war as a kind of 'radicalised' Troelstra.

Like Wijnkoop, Willem van Ravesteyn (1876–1970) joined the SDAP in 1898, in Leiden, the same section as Pannekoek. Van Ravesteyn was a literary historian, later to become a library curator, and translated Jean Jaurès's writings into Dutch. Like Wijnkoop, he was an organiser for the Tribune movement, then for the Dutch CP. Considered 'dry and pedantic' by Pannekoek, he followed Wijnkoop through all his political changes until 1925.

The same was true of Jan Cornelis Ceton (1875–1943). A teacher of 'simple and clear convictions' according to Pannekoek, he was a leader of the socialist teachers' union, and secretary of the revolutionary section in Amsterdam III. Although not much of a theoretician, he was the real organiser and financier, first of *De Tribune*, then of the SDP and the CPH. Together, the three formed the 'triumvirate' which was the de facto, if somewhat dubious, leadership of the Tribune, then the Communist movement in the Netherlands until 1925. From 1917 onwards, this triumvirate was the sworn enemy of the communist left represented by Gorter.

Despite their firm revolutionary convictions in the early days of the Tribune movement, this triumvirate was, in the long run and during the war (see Chapter Three), to prove opportunist in character. Its oscillation between a radical sectarianism and a 'centrist' and devious practice helped to weaken the international influence of the Dutch Marxist left. Seen from the outside, the latter seemed to form a theoretical and political whole. In reality, it was more

29 See Koejemans 1967. This book was written by a leader of the CPN, who after 1945 was editor-in-chief of the CPN daily paper *De Waarheid*. Anthoon Koejemans (1903–82) was a collaborator of the CPN publishing-house Pegasus. In disagreement with the CPN's 'party-line', he left in 1955.

a sum of its parts, whose most brilliant and most revolutionary members, like Gorter and Pannekoek, were in fact at some remove from the centre of political decision-making.

The weakness of the Dutch left at its inception was that internationally-recognised Marxist theoreticians like Gorter and Pannekoek, and even Roland Holst, had little weight in the organisational life of the SDAP. In this, they differed from Luxemburg and Lenin, who were both theoreticians and party-organisers, with enough political authority in Russia and Poland to give direction to their party's activity. Whereas Wijnkoop was a full-time party-member in both the SDAP and the SDP, neither Gorter nor Pannekoek were full-time 'professional revolutionaries'. Despite his dynamism as a militant, Gorter was constantly torn between his activity as a poet – to which he sometimes devoted himself entirely – and his militant-activity as a party-propagandist and orator. Hence his occasionally truncated, episodic activity which sometimes led him to disappear from party-congresses.<sup>30</sup> Pannekoek was undoubtedly a militant, but was bound up in both his astronomical research and his activity as a Marxist theoretician. Although he was active, he never felt at ease dealing with concrete organisational problems.<sup>31</sup> He only devoted himself fully to the socialist movement during his time in Germany between 1906 and 1914, when he really was a 'professional revolutionary'. He was outside the Netherlands at the most crucial moment of the split between revisionists and Marxists.

During this period of the slow development of the workers' movement, the weight of personalities was still enormous. This was all the more negative in

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30 In 1903, Gorter published his individually inspired *Verzen*. Later, his support for the idea of 'proletarian' art led him to publish 'socialist' poems, which were far from having the poetical strength and value of *Mei* ('May'). The poem *Een klein heldendicht* ('A little epic', 1906) recounts the evolution of a young proletarian towards socialism. Other poems were more inspired: *Pan* (1912) is a story of the emancipation of men and women, while *De Arbeidersraad* ('The workers' council') is an epic description of the world-proletariat's terrible defeat during the 1920s. Gorter's poetry swings between personal lyricism and the didactic socialist epic. Unlike Trotsky, Mehring and others, he considered it possible to develop a 'pure proletarian art'. His eight volumes of poetical works have been published by Querido, Bussum–Amsterdam, 1950–52.

31 In 1912 Pannekoek wrote to Kautsky that, in general, he preferred 'only to contribute theoretical clarification'. He added, 'You know that ... I only allow myself to get dragged into practical struggles when I am forced to do so' (cited by B.A. Sijes in Pannekoek 1982, p. 15). During Pannekoek's period as a militant (1899–1921), to say this would certainly have been an exaggeration. But unlike Lenin and Luxemburg, Pannekoek felt himself to be more a 'teacher' than a man of action in the thick of the daily struggle. This 'pedagogical' spirit was to develop fully during the 1920s and '30s.



that the party-leaders were avowed revisionists who used their organisational power to crush the party's political life. Such was Troelstra, once a member of the Friesian Popular Party, then of the SDB. He was a Friesian poet in his spare time, with an interest in occultism and spiritualism. A lawyer, he was typical of the parliamentary politician, adept at backstairs-manoeuvres. Regularly re-elected to Parliament from 1897 onwards, at first by the backward peasants of Friesland, he had a tendency to identify himself with the interests of the petty-bourgeoisie. He was close to Bernstein and, in the final analysis, considered himself a bourgeois liberal, to the point where in 1912 he could declare that 'Social Democracy today plays the same role as the Liberal Party around 1848'.<sup>32</sup> But he was sufficiently cunning as to appear close to Kautsky's centre during the congresses of the Second International, in order to keep his hands free at home. He was deeply concerned with keeping both his seat in Parliament and his control over the SDAP, and was ready for any manoeuvre to eliminate any criticism from the left, and even to exclude his Marxist opponents. Others were even more revisionist than Troelstra: the ex-typesetter Willem H. Vliegen (1862–1947), the ex-house-painter Johan H.A. Schaper (1868–1934), and Henri H. van Kol (1852–1925) openly declared themselves against the revolutionary road, and for the 'parliamentary road' to socialism. All were members of Parliament. This reformist and revisionist right had its mass-base in the few trades-unions attached to the SDAP: the transport-union (NVST) led by the reformist Jan Oudegeest (1870–1950), and above all the General Union of Diamond-Workers (ANDB), founded in 1894 and led by Henri Polak (1868–1943). This latter, although he eventually joined the revisionists, was actively sympathetic towards the Tribunists.

This weight of revisionist leaders in a newly created party – a party that was, moreover, formed as the result of an ambiguous split – was a serious barrier to the regroupment of the Marxist left.

The left grouped around the periodical *De Nieuwe Tijd*. Rallying behind Van der Goes were the new recruits to the SDAP: not only Gorter, Pannekoek, Roland Holst, Van Ravesteyn, Pieter Wiedijk and Wibaut, but also Wijnkoop and Henk J.F.M. Sneevliet. However, this left was not homogeneous, and at the crucial moment of the 1909 split, some of them abandoned it. Wibaut and Van der Goes also capitulated. The generations of young Marxists who had joined the SDAP full of enthusiasm were not slow to see the turn towards revisionism in

32 Troelstra 1912. Quoted by De Wolff 1978.

Salomon (Sam) de Wolff (1878–1960) was a Tribunist from 1909 to 1913, before returning to the SDAP. He later became a Zionist, and after the Second World-War a member of the Social-Democratic Labour-Party (PvdA). Biography by De Jonge in *BWN* 1985.

their party's practice. As early as 1901, they began a bitter struggle to defend the revolutionary principles that were being trampled upon. Their struggle was all the more relentless in that militants like Gorter and Pannekoek had political ties, and even ties of friendship, with their 'spiritual master' Karl Kautsky. They hoped that the latter would support them in the struggle against revisionism not just in the German, but also in the Dutch party. They were sorely mistaken as to the extent to which they could rely on this support.<sup>33</sup>

## 6 Marxism's First Struggles against Revisionism

As has so often been the case throughout the history of the workers' movement, the struggle for the defence of revolutionary principles was initially focused on practical issues. The struggle against opportunism in the Dutch party centred around two problems which, with hindsight, may seem of little importance today: the peasant-question, and the schools-question.

The importance of the peasant-question was obvious in a country like the Netherlands, whose commercial capital invested in the colonies was accompanied by archaic social structures in the countryside. Apart from its livestock-sector, Dutch agriculture remained backward, although beginning to develop, with a still-large mass of equally backward peasants, especially in Friesland, Troelstra's 'fiefdom'. Alongside the peasants, a mass of landless farm-workers hired out their labour-power to peasants, landlords and farmers. To attract the peasant-vote, which sent a substantial proportion of the SDAP's deputies to Parliament, in 1901 a change to the party's programme was proposed. Instead of the abolition of the existing order through the socialisation of the land, and, therefore, the abolition of private property, the new programme proposed to regulate the 'farm-tenancy contract'.<sup>34</sup> Worse still, from the standpoint of the socialist programme, was the point devoted to agricultural workers. Instead of linking up their struggle to that of the workers in the factories and emphasising the interests they had in common with the rest of the proletariat, the programme proposed no less than to transform them into peasant-freeholders. '2. The provision of land and agricultural equipment at a fixed price for landless farm-workers, to guarantee them an autonomous existence.'

33 See De Liagre Böhl 1973, pp. 23–5. As with Rosa Luxemburg, Gorter and Pannekoek's friendship with Kautsky did not prevent them from having political divergences. Revolutionary truth came before personal feelings.

34 For the struggle of Marxism against revisionism, see Gorter, Pannekoek and Van Ravesteyn 1909.

These slogans promoted by the Troelstra leadership were a clear declaration of reformism, proposing not to abolish, but rather to improve capitalist society. As the left of the party pointed out: 'these two slogans are in contradiction with the development of society in a socialist direction'.

However, at the Hague Congress of 1905, under pressure from the left, and with the support of Kautsky who at the time held a left-wing position on the agrarian question,<sup>35</sup> these two points were struck from the party's agrarian programme: 'It was Marxism's first struggle, and its first victory. But also its only victory'.<sup>36</sup>

The struggle against reformism was indeed only just beginning, and entered a new stage with the debates in the Dutch Parliament on the subsidies to be accorded to schools depending on religious affiliations. For obvious ideological reasons, the lay governors wanted the state to support the religiously based schools financially. The Marxist struggle against this manoeuvre of the liberal bourgeoisie had nothing in common with the anti-clericalism of the contemporary French radicals and socialists. As Luxemburg noted, the latter was a diversion, 'one of the most effective means of distracting the working masses' from social questions, and exhausting the class-struggle.<sup>37</sup>

The support given to the various religious denominations in the Netherlands was essentially due to the rise of the class-struggle, which provoked an ideological reaction from the liberal bourgeoisie in power.<sup>38</sup> Following the typical reasoning of the workers' movement of the time, the left pointed out that: 'with the upsurge of the proletarian class-struggle, the liberals, always and everywhere, look on religion as a necessary rampart for capitalism, and little-by-little abandon their resistance to religious schools'.<sup>39</sup>

Imagine the surprise of the Marxists, grouped around the periodical *De Nieuwe Tijd*, to see the revisionists come out openly in Parliament in favour of a vote for state-support for religious schools. Worse still, the 1902 Socialist

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35 See Kautsky 1899. This book is a polemic against Bernstein's revisionism, and a remarkable study of the development of classes in the countryside. It resists concessions to the petty-bourgeois strata of the peasantry to the detriment of the poorest peasants.

36 See Gorter, Pannekoek and Van Ravesteijn 1909, pp. 4–5.

37 Luxemburg 1971, p. 213. In France, by contrast, the bourgeoisie's radical-socialist fraction made full use of the 'anti-clerical card' in order to counter the development of the workers' and socialist movement. It hoped thereby to drag socialism onto treacherous ground, by using the popularity of 'anti-clericalism' amongst the workers and the petty bourgeoisie.

38 Gorter, Pannekoek and Van Ravesteijn 1909, Chapter 'Die Schulfrage' ('The school-question').

39 Congress-resolution in Gorter, Pannekoek and Van Ravesteijn 1909, p. 5.

Groningen Congress clearly abandoned the whole Marxist struggle against the grip of religious ideology. In a country where, for historical reasons, religion weighed heavily in its triple form of Catholicism, Calvinism and Judaism, this was a real capitulation: 'The Congress ... notes that the majority of the labouring class in the Netherlands demands a religious education for its children, and considers it undesirable to oppose this, since it is not for the Social Democracy to break – because of theological disagreements – the economic unity of the working class against both religious and non-religious capitalists.'<sup>40</sup>

The pretext employed here – the unity of religious and non-religious workers – presupposed acceptance of the existing ideological and economic order. Thus, 'with this resolution, the party [took] the first step on the road to reformism; it [meant] a break with the revolutionary programme, whose demand for the separation of Church and state certainly does not mean state-money for religious schools.'<sup>41</sup>

It is interesting to note that the Dutch left had no intention of glorifying the 'secular' school, whose pretended 'neutrality' it denounced. It did not base its position on a choice – false from the Marxist viewpoint – between 'religious' and 'secular' schools. Its aim was to stand resolutely on the terrain of the class-struggle; this meant rejecting any collaboration, under any pretext, with any 'freethinker' fraction of the bourgeoisie. The Marxists' misgivings about the party's revisionist orientation were to prove well-founded in the heat of class-struggle.

## 7 The 1903 Transport-Strikes

This strike was the most important movement of the Dutch working class before the First World-War. It was to leave a deep mark on the proletariat, which felt betrayed by Social Democracy, and whose most militant layers turned still more towards revolutionary syndicalism. From 1903 onwards, the split between Marxism and revisionism was well underway, with no possibility of turning back. In this sense, the 1903 strike marked the real beginning of the 'Tribunist' movement as a revolutionary force.

The transport-strike was first and foremost a protest against conditions of exploitation that are hard to imagine today. The railworkers' living-conditions were worthy of the period of capitalism's primitive accumulation during the

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40 Gorter, Pannekoek and Van Ravesteyn 1909, p. 6.

41 Gorter, Pannekoek and Van Ravesteyn 1909.

nineteenth century.<sup>42</sup> In 1900, they worked 361 days a year, with only four days of holiday. Moreover, a strong feeling of corporatism reduced the possibilities of a united struggle, due to the divisions between different trades. The mechanics, engine-drivers and track-maintenance workers all had their own unions. Each union could start strikes, without any of the others joining the struggle. The unions' jealous, exclusivist defence of their particular trades' interests created a barrier to uniting the mass of workers above and beyond divisions of skill.<sup>43</sup>

A wildcat-strike against these conditions broke out on 31 January 1903, starting from the rank-and-file of the railworkers, and not from the trades-unions. It emerged as a mass-strike: not only did it hit all the transport-trades, it spread throughout the country. It was also a mass-strike, in that it started not on the basis of specific demands, but in solidarity with the workers of Amsterdam harbour who were out on strike. The transport-workers refused to act as strikebreakers by continuing to work, and so blocked the bosses' attempts to move their goods by rail. This movement of solidarity, characteristic of mass-strikes, then snowballed: the bakers and rolling-stock engineers gave their support.<sup>44</sup> But there is no doubt that the pioneering feature of the movement – which did not succeed in spreading to other sectors of the Dutch proletariat – lay in the creation of a strike-committee, elected by the rank-and-file rather than being designated by the transport-union and the SDAP, even if their members did participate in it.<sup>45</sup>

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42 It was not uncommon to find workers working six 14-hour days a week. On the inhuman conditions of the transport-workers and the development of the Dutch workers' movement in this period, see: Rüter 1935.

43 These craft-unions, a vestige of the artisan period of the workers' movement, were gradually replaced by industrial unions. The latter brought together all the workers in an industrial branch, whatever their trade. The development of the mass-strike at the beginning of the century was, however, to demonstrate that in the open struggle against capital, organising by industrial branches had been superseded by the mass-organisation of the workers of all branches. The idea of 'One Big Union' advocated by the American IWW was quickly shown to be inadequate, since it foresaw only an economic struggle in this-or-that branch, whereas the mass-strike tended to become political, through the confrontation of a whole class with the state, and not just some of its parts.

44 See A. De Jong 1935. Anarchist view of the railway-strike. Albert de Jong (1891–1970) remains an important figure of the anti-militarist anarchist movement, particularly active in the IAMV and IAK organisations between 1922 and 1934. From 1936 to 1940, he was the driving force behind the NSV, anarcho-syndicalist union.

45 Pannekoek speaks in a very lively manner on the strike, from a Marxist point of view, in his *Herinneringen* (Pannekoek 1982, pp. 86–93). He lucidly describes the spontaneous emergence of the strike-committee and the rapid spread of the movement.

All these characteristics meant that the mass-strike ceased to be a purely trade-, economic strike; little-by-little, through its direct confrontation with the state it became political. On 6 February, a decree from the Dutch government's war-ministry declared the mobilisation of the army; it also created a body, within which the Catholic and Protestant unions were active, to rally the strike-breakers.<sup>46</sup> This bourgeois offensive culminated on 25 February with the tabling of a bill banning strikes: the strikers were threatened with imprisonment, and the government decided to deploy a military transport-unit to break the strike.

But, worse than all the threats and government measures, the strike was undermined from within by Troelstra's SDAP. On 20 February, at a meeting addressing the interests of some 60,000 strikers, and which – unlike the strike-committee – was not held in open session, Troelstra proposed the creation of a 'Defence-Committee' (*Comité van Verweer*) made up of different political and union-organisations. This committee was made up of Vliegen, a SDAP revisionist, the transport-boss J. Oudegeest, the NAS, and anarchist followers of Nieuwenhuis, the latter having refused to take part in such a body himself. Its orientation was to prove damaging to the proposed strike against the government's measures. Vliegen declared that the strike could not be called, because the religious (Calvinist, Lutheran, and Catholic) Abraham Kuyper government had not yet published its decrees. Indeed, the attitude of this 'Defence-Committee' – self-appointed as the workers' representatives, with the support of various organisations, particularly the SDAP – soon showed its negative face. Not only was the committee paralysed by the opposition between Nieuwenhuis's libertarian followers and the Social Democrats, but the overbearing influence of Troelstra, not a member of the committee despite having himself initiated it, meant that it remained outside the struggle.<sup>47</sup> Using the pretext of the struggle against 'anarchist adventurism', Troelstra came out against a political strike: he claimed that if the workers were to decide on a political strike in reaction to the 'scandalous laws', this would only make the situation in Parliament worse. This was written in the Social-Democrat daily without any reference either to the 'Defence-Committee' or to the party-authorities.<sup>48</sup> This undisciplined act was clear proof that the revisionist leadership did not consider itself

46 A. De Jong 1935, pp. 17–19.

47 The anarcho-syndicalists were by far the most determined in the strike, but they remained prisoners of their theory of the 'general strike'. In practice, the attitudes of the anarcho-syndicalist NAS in the strike-committee fluctuated, and proved more 'to the right' than its rank-and-file membership.

48 Article titled 'Wat nu?' ('What now?'), in *Het Volk* of 17 March 1903.

accountable either to the workers or to the party-militants. It acted autonomously, all the better to place itself on the terrain of conciliation with the bourgeoisie. Through Pannekoek's pen, the left vigorously criticised this behaviour, which was the beginning of a long series of betrayals of the struggle: 'Your flabby and hesitant conduct cannot but serve the possessing class and the government', Pannekoek wrote against Troelstra.<sup>49</sup>

This betrayal came out into the open during the second transport-strike, in April. The government had carried the vote in favour of its anti-strike laws, forbidding all stoppages in public transport. Instead of adopting an energetic attitude, the Social-Democrat leaders on the committee, such as Oudegeest, came out against a general strike to include all workers throughout the Netherlands. And yet, at that very moment, strikes had, indeed, broken out, creating a social context far more favourable to the class-struggle than it had been in January and February: in Amsterdam the boatmen, blacksmiths, road-workers, navvies and engineers were all out on strike, while the municipal workers had walked out in sympathy.

On 8 April, the general strike was called, under pressure from the rank-and-file. Its initial weakness lay in the fact that the railworkers' meetings were held in secret, and were, therefore, closed to workers from other industries. Despite the occupation of the stations and tracks by the army, which should have encouraged the spreading of the strike, it failed to become general. The movement to build the struggle was, nonetheless, spontaneous: in Utrecht and Amsterdam, the engineers and masons joined the solidarity-movement. Neither the presence of the army, nor the threat of five years' imprisonment for 'agitators' and two for strikers, provided for by the new laws, were enough to cool the ardour of the striking workers, who since January had experienced 'the joy of the struggle'.<sup>50</sup>

The workers' momentum and fervour were broken by the decisions taken by the Social-Democratic leaders of the 'Defence-Committee', which claimed to be leading the struggle. On 9 April, Vliegen imposed the decision to halt

49 Pannekoek's reply to Troelstra, in *Het Volk* of 26 March 1903. Without using the word 'treason', Pannekoek denounced this 'crime against unity', the 'damage done to the workers' movement', and the 'dishonour to the party'.

50 Roland Holst emphasised this joy in struggle as a characteristic of the mass-strike: 'More than organisation, or skill in struggle, at the beginning of the twentieth century in The Netherlands there was among the workers a pleasure in struggle', expressed in 'a spontaneous resistance on both a small and a large scale' (see Roland Holst 1902). In 1903 she wrote a pamphlet that avoided any criticism of the SADP for its attitude towards the strike (Roland Holst 1903).

the strike movement. Faced with the transport workers' fury and incredulity, the Committee disappeared. At a mass-meeting, the workers shouted down Vliegen with cries of 'He's betrayed us!'. Even the left was prevented from speaking: the workers made no distinction between Marxists and revisionists, and Roland Holst's speech was met with the cry of 'Strike!'. The attitude of the revisionist leaders was thus to provoke a long-lasting rejection by the Dutch working class of the whole Social Democracy, including its Marxist wing, to the benefit of anarcho-syndicalism.<sup>51</sup>

The 1903 transport-strike did not have purely 'Dutch' roots; it marked a turning point in the European class-struggle. It broke out as a spontaneous mass-strike, becoming a conscious force capable of pushing back the bourgeoisie politically, and giving the workers an unquestionable feeling of victory. But its failure was that of a general strike launched by the unions and parties.

This strike fell within a whole historical period marked by a combination of political and economic strikes, and culminating in the Russian revolutionary movement of 1905. As Rosa Luxemburg emphasised, 'only in a revolutionary situation, with the development of the proletariat's political action, does the full dimension of the mass-strike's importance and extent appear'.<sup>52</sup>

Rosa Luxemburg, in her polemic against the revisionists, demonstrated better than anyone – except Pannekoek – the struggle's homogeneity, that is to say, an identical and simultaneous phenomenon at the turn of the century spreading throughout Europe, including the Netherlands, and as far as the American continent:

In 1900, according to the American comrades, the mass-strike of the Pennsylvanian miners did more for the spread of socialist ideas than ten years of agitation; again in 1900 came the mass-strike of the Austrian miners. In 1902, that of the miners in France. Again in 1902, a strike paralysed the whole productive apparatus of Barcelona, in solidarity with the engineers' struggle, while, still in 1902, a mass-strike in Sweden demonstrated for universal suffrage; similarly in Belgium during the same year, while more than 200,000 farmworkers throughout eastern Galicia struck in defence of the right to form trades-unions; in January and April 1903,

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51 The survival of anarchism and the spread of revolutionary syndicalism were – according to the theoreticians of the Marxist left – the 'price paid for the development of opportunism within the socialist workers' movement'. However, in the Netherlands, as in France and Spain, many revolutionary syndicalists were to rally to the Communist Party after 1919.

52 Luxemburg 1910.



two mass-strikes by Dutch railwaymen; in 1904, a mass-strike by rail-workers in Hungary; in 1904, strikes and demonstrations in Italy, to protest against the massacres in Sardinia; in January 1905, a mass-strike by the Ruhr miners; in October 1905, a strike with demonstrations in Prague and the surrounding regions (more than 100,000 workers) for universal suffrage in the Galician regional parliament. In November 1905, mass-strikes and demonstrations throughout Austria for universal suffrage in the Imperial Council; in 1905 once again, a mass-strike of Italian farm-workers; and still in 1905, a mass-strike of the Italian railway-workers ...<sup>53</sup>

By preparing the political confrontation with the state, the mass-strike poses the question of the revolution. Not only did it demonstrate the 'revolutionary energy' and the 'proletarian instinct' of the working masses – as Gorter emphasised after the 1903 strike<sup>54</sup> – but it profoundly altered the whole situation at the turn of the century: 'We have every reason to think that we have now embarked on a period of struggles where what is at stake is the state's power and institutions; struggles that may last for decades through all kinds of difficulties, whose length cannot yet be foreseen, but which will very probably in the short term usher in a fundamental change in the balance of class-forces in favour of the proletariat, if not the seizure of power by the workers in Western Europe.'<sup>55</sup>

These remarks by Kautsky in his book *Der Weg zur Macht* ('The Road to Power') were to be taken up by the Dutch left against Kautsky and his supporters in the Netherlands, such as Troelstra and Vliegen. The 1903 strike did, indeed, pose the question of 'reform or revolution', and inevitably led, within the SDAP, to a confrontation with the reformists, who were betraying not only the party's revolutionary spirit, but the immediate struggle as well.

## 8 The Marxist Opposition within the SDAP (1903–7)

The opposition within the party was to be all the more vigorous in that the consequences of the defeat of the strike, sabotaged by the Troelstra-Vliegen

53 Ibid.

54 Intervention by Gorter at the SDAP's 1903 Ninth Congress; quoted by Rüter 1935, p. 573.

55 Karl Kautsky, as quoted in Luxemburg 1910. Rosa Luxemburg makes polemical use of Karl Kautsky's declarations in favour of revolution. *Der Weg zur Macht* ('The Road to Power'), written in 1909, had been the swan-song of the 'pope of Marxism'.

leadership, were a disaster for the workers' movement. About 4,000 workers were fired for having taken strike action. The membership of the NAS, despite its militant position during the struggle and its opposition to Vliegen, fell from 8,000 in 1903 to 6,000 in 1904. Troelstra's SDAP, which now had a reputation for betrayal, also suffered a considerable drop in membership, from 6,500 members at the end of 1902 to 5,600 at the end of 1903.<sup>56</sup> By contrast, a sign of the ebb, or even demoralisation, at the end of the strike could be seen in the rapid growth of the religious-based unions. Politically, the most combative union movement, the NAS, which could have become the SDAP's economic organisation, drew closer to the anarchist positions of Domela Nieuwenhuis. The fall in membership continued until the emergence of the Tribunist movement, which increasingly influenced it.<sup>57</sup> By contrast, in 1905 the socialist unions linked to the SDAP created their own central union federation: the NVV (Confederation of Trades-Unions of the Netherlands). Strongly influenced by Henri Polak's<sup>58</sup> reformist diamond-workers' union, it quickly became the major union federation in the country. Right from the start, the NVV refused to help spread the struggle in the building-industry; in the years that followed, it adopted the same attitude of holding back and avoiding solidarity with striking workers.<sup>59</sup>

Faced with the development of reformism in the party, and its weakening as a workers' party, the Marxists at first adopted a moderate attitude. Not only did they hesitate to form a determined fraction to conquer the leadership of the party, but their attacks on Troelstra remained extremely cautious. Although Troelstra had actively betrayed the strike, they still hesitated to speak of treachery. When the party's assessment of the transport-strike was discussed at the SDAP's Ninth Congress at the end of 1903, Gorter spoke in measured terms. While insisting that he was 'an opponent of the Troelstra leadership, not only in this strike, but also in other important matters', he hesitated to speak of the

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56 Figures given by Rüter 1935, p. 550.

57 After the Party's 1909 split, the NAS was strongly influenced by Sneevliet, who in 1910 was president of the Dutch confederation of rail- and tramway-personnel (*Nederlandsche Vereeniging van Spoor- en Tramwegpersoneel* [NVSTP]), which he left in 1912 after the defeat of the previous year's sailors' strike.

58 Henri Polak, after toying with 'Marxist' ideas and Tribunist sympathies, turned revisionist. He was a SDAP Member of Parliament 1913–37.

59 Under the pretext of not following the NAS's direct-action instructions, the NVV in fact favoured withdrawing from the strikes, refusing any solidarity with the Amsterdam building-workers' strike in 1909–10 and with the sailors' strike in 1911. For this last strike, see Sneevliet 1911.

betrayal of the leadership: 'Naturally, there is no question of betrayal, but of the weakness of Troelstra's political conceptions, and of his constant wavering'.<sup>60</sup>

The 1903 Enschede Congress did not have the salutary effect that the Marxists of *De Nieuwe Tijd* had hoped for. Although Troelstra had to give up the editorship of *Het Volk* ('*The People*'), to be replaced by Tak,<sup>61</sup> Gorter was forced to shake his hand in the name of 'solidarity' and 'unity' in the party against the 'common external enemy'.<sup>62</sup> Troelstra managed to foster the impression that Gorter and his partisans were attacking him personally, not politically. Complaining that there were those who wanted to deprive him of his leadership-responsibilities, he raised the question of confidence. He posed as a victim, rather than his true role as one of the elements most responsible for the party's opportunist orientation: he thus obtained the 'confidence' of the party as a whole. In this way the revisionist leadership avoided a discussion of vital questions of principle and tactics in the class-struggle. Although it was completely isolated, the Marxist minority did not capitulate and resolutely carried on fighting. From 1905 to 1907, the Marxist current found itself confronted with a vigorous counter-offensive by the revisionists.

### 8.1 *From the Hague (1905) to the Utrecht (1906) Congress*

The parliamentary fraction, which was the real leadership of the party, went further and further in collaborating with the bourgeoisie. In 1905, during the elections for the provincial councils, the revisionists raised the idea of supporting the liberals against the *Anti-Revolutionaire Partij* ('Anti-Revolutionary Party' – ARP) government of Abraham Kuyper, which had broken the transport-strike. In elections, the left did not refuse support to liberal candidates who took a stand in favour of universal suffrage against property-based electoral rights. It had adopted a resolution in this sense during the 1905 Hague Congress: '[the party] declares that during the elections it will only support candidates who stand for the urgent introduction of universal suffrage'.<sup>63</sup>

But for the Marxists, there could be no question of turning this tactical and temporary support into a principle. Contrary to what Troelstra argued, it was

60 Proceedings of the Ninth Congress, quoted in Gorter, Pannekoek and Van Ravesteijn 1909, p. 8.

61 This appointment of the writer and journalist Pieter Lodewijk Tak (1848–1907) was the only concession made to the left. See biographies by Thys 1956 and by G.W.B. Borrie in *BWN* 1979.

62 Unlike Wijnkoop and Van Ravesteijn, Gorter always had a real concern for the organisation's unity, while remaining intransigent in political debate.

63 See Gorter, Pannekoek and Van Ravesteijn 1909, p. 8.

not at all a matter of calling workers to vote for 'liberals of any stripe', even if they were anti-clerical. From a class-standpoint, the fight was not against a particular capitalist party, but against capitalism as a totality. In order to avoid being mixed up with the petty-bourgeois and small-peasant elements, the workers had to be clear about their real identity. As Pannekoek, Gorter and Van Ravesteijn wrote in a booklet – *The Founding of the SDP* – distributed to the German Social-Democrat press to explain the split of 1909: 'At every opportunity the party must show the workers that their enemies sit on the left side of Parliament just as much as on the right ...'<sup>64</sup>

But instead of respecting the resolutions of the congress, the party-leadership, the parliamentary fraction and the Socialist daily *Het Volk* left Socialist electors free to vote for any liberal candidate they liked. Although firmly sticking by positions traditional to the workers' movement, the Marxists found themselves isolated from the working masses. Troelstra played on this as much as he could.

There were, however, reactions within the party. Despite the events of 1903, the party was far from having succumbed to revisionism; it was still capable of proletarian reactions against Troelstra's parliamentary fraction. The Hague Congress of 1905, no doubt under the pressure of the revolutionary events taking place in Russia, nominated a new directing committee for the party, this time composed of a majority of Marxists, including Gorter.<sup>65</sup> Opposition then grew between the new committee and Troelstra's parliamentary fraction. The latter wanted to support the new liberal government 'in order to push it along the road of reform'. For the directing committee, based around the *De Nieuwe Tijd* group, this was out of the question. The real issue was to develop agitation against the limitation of the right to strike, no matter what the government, whether liberal or clerical. Once again, Troelstra violated party-discipline by taking up a position which condemned workers' agitation. On 9 March 1906, in front of the bourgeois parliamentarians, he openly disclaimed the actions taken by the workers and supported by the party, despite the fact that he was a member of the directing committee.<sup>66</sup>

This conflict posed a vital question in the workers' movement: was it the parliamentary fraction or the directing committee, elected by the party, which determined the policy of the organisation? It was a question of whether the

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64 Ibid.

65 Gorter, Pannekoek and Van Ravesteijn 1909, p. 9. With Gorter were Wijnkoop, Mendels, and Wibaut.

66 Gorter, Pannekoek and Van Ravesteijn 1909, p. 11. The committee contented itself with expressing its 'astonishment' at Troelstra's positions.

party was in the service of an uncontrolled group of parliamentarians conducting a policy of collaboration with the bourgeoisie, or whether the activities of this group were to be tightly controlled by the decisions taken at the party-congress. This conflict over influence and decision-making was not unique to the Netherlands. In Germany, for example, Rosa Luxemburg had to fight against the parliamentary leadership.<sup>67</sup> The question of who was the real leadership of the party was identical with the question of preserving its revolutionary character. In Russia, after 1905, when the Bolsheviks had deputies in the Duma, their parliamentary fraction was tightly controlled by the central committee; and it was no accident that it was one of the few that voted against war-credits in August 1914.

This opposition between Troelstra and the directing committee was to pose the real underlying question: reform or revolution. In a pamphlet which he brought out in time for the Utrecht Congress (15–17 April 1906), Troelstra attacked the party's new committee, pretending as usual that he was being attacked personally and that the new Marxist leadership was 'doctrinaire' and 'dogmatic'.<sup>68</sup> Presenting himself as the 'innocent' victim of persecution by the Gorter group, he could not however hide what really lay at the root of his thinking: that the SDAP should be a national party, and not an internationalist one. The party had to make compromises with the small and big bourgeoisie: not only did it have to take account of the petty-bourgeois prejudices existing within the proletariat – 'the religious and partly petty-bourgeois character of the proletariat'<sup>69</sup> – but it also had to 'play on the conflicts between bourgeois groups amongst themselves'. To make this reformist orientation more palatable, Troelstra did not hesitate to resort to anti-intellectual demagoguery: the Marxists were 'ultra-infantile' and wanted to transform the party into a 'propaganda-club'.<sup>70</sup> The Marxist dream had to be countered with the 'solid'

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67 Rosa Luxemburg was able to pose the real underlying question: reform or revolution. Thus she could write: '... [W]hat counts above all is the general organisation of our agitation and our press in order to lead the toiling masses to rely more and more on their own forces and autonomous action and no longer to consider the parliamentary struggle as the central axis of political life'. From the revolutionary point of view, it was vital to 'warn the conscious working class against the pernicious illusion that it is possible to artificially reanimate democracy and the bourgeois opposition in Parliament by moderating and watering down the social-democratic class-struggle' (*Sächsische Arbeiterzeitung*, 5–6 December 1904).

68 Troelstra 1906.

69 Troelstra 1906, p. 96.

70 This demagoguery used by Troelstra, who draped himself in 'workerist' colours, was often

reality of parliament: 'Will the party float above the heads of the real workers, basing itself on an imaginary proletariat, or, as it has since the beginning of its existence and its activity in Parliament and in the municipal councils, will it penetrate ever more deeply into the real life of our people?'<sup>71</sup>

Thus, for Troelstra, the only possible way forwards for the proletariat – which, moreover, he deliberately amalgamated with other 'popular strata' – took place not in the class-struggle but in Parliament.

To achieve his goals – making the party a purely-parliamentary Dutch national party – Troelstra proposed nothing less than the elimination of the Marxist leadership, the reorganisation of the party giving full powers to the parliamentary fraction, which until that point had only two representatives on the directing committee, according to the statutes. The executive of the party-committee, elected by the militants, was to be replaced by the 'executive' of the parliamentary fraction; the latter – according to him – 'represents the party – not officially, but in fact, in Parliament and in practical politics'.<sup>72</sup> The aim was, in fact, to establish a veritable dictatorship of the revisionist fraction; it wanted nothing less than to control all the party-organs in order to deprive the left of any freedom of criticism.

A skilful campaign waged by Troelstra, Vliegen and Schaper among the militants allowed them to pose as victims of a witch-hunt, not against revisionism but against themselves personally. They were so successful that a resolution adopted at the Utrecht Congress proposed to limit freedom of discussion and criticism in the party: '[Considering] that the unity of the party is undoubtedly under threat, the Congress deplores this abuse of freedom of criticism, a principle unchallenged in our party, and impresses on all comrades the need to keep criticism within such limits that comrades show respect for the dignity and unity of the party.'<sup>73</sup>

## 8.2 *The New Revisionist Course (1906–7)*

There could be no doubt that this resolution was a veritable sword of Damocles hanging over the head of the Marxists, with the aim of terrorising them and, if possible, making them capitulate to revisionism. After the congress, Troelstra was able to threaten Gorter openly: 'If Gorter speaks yet again of a "rapproche-

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used against the Marxist left. It returned to favour during the 'Bolshevisation' of the communist parties in the 1920s, to crush the communist left.

71 Troelstra 1906, p. 96, quoted in Gorter, Pannekoek and Van Ravesteyn 1909, p. 14.

72 Troelstra 1906, p. 101.

73 Gorter, Pannekoek and Van Ravesteyn 1909, p. 15.

ment with bourgeois democracy", the sting in this assertion will be removed by the resolution.<sup>74</sup>

This triumph of revisionist diktats cleared the way for a revision of the Marxist programme of the party. A commission for revising the programme was formed, in contempt of the party's rules of functioning: the party-committee which decided to nominate the commission did so without a mandate from the congress, the only organ with the authority to decide to revise the programme. The commission, under the influence of the revisionists, proposed nothing less than changing the Marxist conditions for joining the party: if the party was based on Marx's theoretical framework, it was not necessary to accept his underlying materialist philosophy in order to join it. The door was thus open to non-Marxist, religious, and even bourgeois elements.

The Haarlem Congress of 1907 merely confirmed the triumph of revisionism. The few Marxists who were on the commission merely served as a cover for it, barely able to voice their views. The Congress produced a declaration situating the party in the centre, between Marxism and revisionism: 'The programme can be neither orthodox Marxist nor revisionist nor a compromise between the two orientations'.<sup>75</sup> As for Marxism as represented by Gorter, Pannekoek and Roland Holst, it could only be a matter of 'private opinion'.<sup>76</sup>

The defeat that Marxism suffered at this congress was such that neither Pannekoek nor Van der Goes were able to distribute their own pamphlets against the party-leadership.<sup>77</sup> One congress-resolution, adopted unanimously, was even tougher than that adopted at the Utrecht Congress: the right to criticise was suspended in the name of 'party-unity'. Party-democracy was openly trampled upon with the agreement of the great majority of its members, who hoped for an end to what they saw as mere personal quarrels.

For the Marxists, in a very small minority, the choice was between capitulation and struggle: they chose struggle, to fight for the old Marxist orientation of the party. They thus founded their own journal *De Tribune* ('The Tribune'), the name also adopted by its partisans for their tendency.

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74 Gorter, Pannekoek and Van Ravestein 1909, p. 16.

75 Gorter, Pannekoek and Van Ravestein 1909, p. 20.

76 Ibid.

77 Pannekoek 1906; Van der Goes 1907.

## 9 The Birth of the 'Tribunist' Movement

In October 1907 the radical Marxists began to publish their own 'Social-Democratic weekly'. In charge of *De Tribune* were the future leaders of the Tribunist organisation: Wijnkoop, Ceton and Van Ravesteyn, who had the unconditional support of the Amsterdam III district, the party's most revolutionary branch. Pannekoek (Leiden section) and Gorter (Bussum section) contributed regularly, providing some of the best of its theoretical and polemical texts. They were all inspired by the hope of the future revolution: historically it was the most favourable period they had ever faced, with the beginning of an economic crisis which, if they did not yet realise it, represented the early symptoms of a general crisis of capitalism.

They were already anti-parliamentary in orientation: struggles of the working class should link up with the international struggle, it having been freed of any illusions in parliamentary or national solutions. The aim was, in fact: 'Firstly, to unmask the real meaning of the treacherous manoeuvres of bourgeois democracy regarding the right to vote and social reforms, and secondly to give workers an idea of the real meaning of the international situation and the class-struggle abroad.'<sup>78</sup>

It is worth noting that this political line was very close to that of Bordiga's later current, with the proclamation of the political and theoretical struggle against bourgeois democracy and the affirmation of internationalism.<sup>79</sup> The essential difference, however – and this was linked to the historic period – was the fact that the organised struggle of Marxism against revisionism was planned around a theoretical journal and took the form of an opposition. It was only very much later in the development of the workers' movement that it became increasingly necessary to form an organised fraction, rather than an opposition within the party. The Bolsheviks were the first to understand this, even though they too were late in doing so.

It is clear that the Tribunists would have found it extremely difficult to have had any organised activity, apart from in the sections where they had a majority, like in Amsterdam. Driven out of the central leadership-bodies by the revisionists, they conceived their struggle as essentially theoretical. The theoretical contributions of the Marxist-Tribunist current from 1907 to 1909 were, moreover, extremely important, decisive in the constitution of an international communist left (see Chapter Two).

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<sup>78</sup> Gorter 1909a p. 122.

<sup>79</sup> Bourrinet 1999.



But the political fight – with the publication of *De Tribune*, which made no concessions in its struggle against revisionism – very quickly became more acute and soon posed the question of a split in the party. An anti-Marxist witch-hunt began. In Rotterdam, the revisionist leaders sacked the Marxist editors of the local party-paper, just after the Arnhem Congress (19–21 April 1908), which had rejected Troelstra's proposition to ban *De Tribune*. After this, the process of banning other local Marxist publications became widespread.<sup>80</sup> There was open crisis in the party; it was to gather pace with Troelstra's public intervention against Marxist positions in Parliament in front of the bourgeois political parties.

### 9.1 *The Question of the Period and the Crisis*

The confrontation with the Tribunists took place in the autumn of 1908, when Troelstra began arguing certain positions in Parliament: namely, he publicly denied the need for workers to understand the evolution of capitalism in a theoretical way, within a Marxist framework; he maintained that there was 'no need for abstract logical theory' in the class-struggle.<sup>81</sup> Finally, he defended the idea that 'capitalism would lead to socialism by itself'<sup>82</sup> – without any need for revolution and, therefore, in a peaceful and automatic manner. It was tantamount to saying that socialism was no longer determined by the existence of the objective conditions of crisis and the ripening of proletarian consciousness; it became a mere religious belief. *De Tribune* responded to these affirmations in a very violent and biting manner, condemning Troelstra, the symbol of revisionism in the party:

A practical politician of social democracy must also understand theory: he must know it and be able to defend it. For a 'bourgeois' this is perhaps a difficult task, but the working class demands no less of its leaders. For sure this knowledge, this socialist science, is very often easier for a worker to understand than for a man from a bourgeois background. The worker can understand immediately from his own life what socialism means, whilst the bourgeois socialist must first of all understand the theory; for example, what Troelstra is still not clear about: that the economic gap between the classes must always widen ... If the possibility exists that the gap between the classes will not widen, then our socialism is

80 See the chapter 'De Tribune in de SDAP' in Van Ravesteyn 1948.

81 Gorter, Pannekoek and Van Ravesteyn 1909, p. 28.

82 Gorter, Pannekoek and Van Ravesteyn 1909.

diminished to a mere belief; certainty becomes passive hope. The workers are already swindled quite enough with 'hopes' and 'beliefs'. They don't need socialism for that. The Church also supports them in the belief that all will be better in heaven and the good liberals and democrats hope that it will be better soon.<sup>83</sup>

But what was most important in the Tribunist denunciation of revisionism was the theoretical affirmation of the historic course of capitalism towards a global crisis. In this, the Dutch left – with the exception of Pannekoek much later on – was at one with Rosa Luxemburg's position, which she expressed in 1913: 'The so-called "prophecy" of Marx is also being fully realised in the sense that modern capitalism's periods of development are growing shorter and shorter, that in general 'crises' as a force of transition from strong production to weak production are still persisting and, with the development of capitalism, are becoming more prolonged and extensive, so that ills that were once limited locally are more and more becoming worldwide catastrophes.'<sup>84</sup>

The majority in the SDAP considered these attacks on Troelstra's revisionist theories to be merely personal. After this, the revisionists forbade the selling of *De Tribune* at a public meeting where Troelstra was speaking. This was an extremely serious act, of historic significance for the workers' movement and in contradiction with freedom of criticism in a workers' party. This was the beginning of the process of excluding Marxist positions, a process which was to accelerate brutally in the years following 1909.

## 9.2 *Gorter against Troelstra on the Question of 'Proletarian Morality' (December 1908)*

During 1908, *De Tribune* published a collection of Gorter's major contributions to the popularisation of Marxism: 'Historical Materialism Explained to Workers'. Taking the example of the 1903 strike, Gorter showed that the class-struggle produced an authentic class-morality which entered into contradiction with the 'general' morality defended by the supporters of the existing order. The materialist conception, defended by Gorter, which undermined the fundamentals of any religious morality, was violently attacked in Parliament by the Calvinist delegate De Savornin Lohman on 19 and 20 November. In defending the unity of the nation, he accused Social Democracy of wanting to incite war between the classes and thus intoxicate the working class with Marxism.

83 Ibid.

84 See Luxemburg 2003. Pannekoek's critique – 'Theoretisches zur Ursache der Krisen' – was published in Kautsky's *Die Neue Zeit*, Vol. 31 (1912–13), pp. 780–92.

Instead of making a bloc with Gorter in the face of attacks by a representative of this bourgeois line, Troelstra launched into a diatribe against Gorter, whom he presented as unrepresentative of the party and a mere caricature of Marxism. For him, morality was not determined by social relations; it was equally valid for the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. To support this, he drew on the ambiguous concepts that Marx had used in the statutes of the First International: those of rights, duties and justice.<sup>85</sup> But Troelstra, by deliberately confusing values common to mankind and the official morality which he presented as universal, transformed the morality of the class-struggle – guided by common interests and an activity aiming at victory – into a monstrosity. According to this conception, Gorter's materialism was a pure appeal to murder and would lead to barbarism. He alleged, for example, that Gorter would be against 'a worker saving a capitalist's son from drowning'.<sup>86</sup> Troelstra's demagogy in this argument was identical to that of De Savornin Lohman, with whom he sided.

Gorter replied spiritedly, as was his style, against both De Savornin Lohman and Troelstra, with a rapidly-written pamphlet, published for the purposes of the struggle.<sup>87</sup> After a period of political isolation, he threw himself into the struggle for control of the party. Gorter focused sharply on the person of Troelstra, who 'in reality, in the essence of what he is saying, has chosen the camp of the bourgeoisie'.<sup>88</sup> He also demonstrated that Troelstra was betraying Marx's real thinking when he referenced the ambiguous terms of the statutes of the First International. At the same time, Gorter vigorously rebutted the accusation that the morality of the proletariat meant attacking individual capitalists, without any concern for human feelings. The morality of the proletariat was essentially a fighting morality which sought to defend its interests against the bourgeois class, as an economic category and not as a sum of individuals. It was a morality whereby the working class aimed to abolish itself in a

85 In a letter to Lion Philips, dated 29 November 1864, Marx explained very clearly why he had included these figures of speech inherited from a bygone era: 'Out of politeness to the Italians and the French who always use grand phrases, I had to accept a few useless figures of speech in the *Preamble to the Statutes*, but not in the *Address*.' Quoted by Dangeville 1973.

86 This assertion by Troelstra is quoted in Gorter 1908, a polemical pamphlet entitled 'Class morality: an answer to *jongheer* De Savornin Lohman and Mr. P.J. Troelstra, members of Parliament'.

On De Savornin Lohman, Christian conservative Calvinist politician, founder of the *Christelijk Historische Unie* (CHU) in June 1908, see Suttorp 1948.

87 Adapted from the articles published in *De Tribune*, 5 December 1908.

88 See Gorter 1908, p. 11.

classless society, leaving in its place a real morality, that of humanity as a whole liberated from class society.

After this polemic, a split was inevitable. It was what Troelstra himself wanted, in order to rid the party of any critical Marxist tendency. In a letter to Vliegen on 3 December he wrote: 'The schism is there; the only recourse can be a split'.

## 10      The Split at the Extraordinary Congress at Deventer (13–14 February 1909)

In order to eliminate the Tribunists and their periodical, the revisionist leaders proposed a referendum to examine the question of suppressing *De Tribune* at an extraordinary congress. The party-committee was hesitant about, and even opposed to, such an extraordinary measure. Troelstra went over the committee's head and through a referendum obtained the two-thirds vote needed to convoke a congress. It thus became apparent that the great majority of the SDAP was gangrenous with revisionism; the rank-and-file was even more revisionist than the leadership.

Furthermore, the Marxist elements who had come out of *De Nieuwe Tijd* and had collaborated with *De Tribune* capitulated to Troelstra. During a conference held on 31 January, to which the main Tribunist editors were not even invited, Roland Holst and Wibaut<sup>89</sup> declared that they were ready to quit the editorship of their periodical in order to run a future weekly supplement (*Het Weekblad*) to *Het Volk*, the SDAP daily. The new publication would be free of any Marxist critique of revisionism. Instead of acting in solidarity with their comrades in struggle, they made an oath of allegiance to Troelstra, declaring themselves in favour of 'a common work of loyal partycomradeship'.<sup>90</sup> They proclaimed themselves 'Marxists for peace', trying to take refuge in a centrist attitude of conciliation between the right and the Marxist left. Roland Holst constantly maintained this attitude. The Tribunists were not slow to reproach Roland Holst for this capitulation; it was an attitude that only made more certain the split that the revisionists wanted.

It is true that, for its part, the Marxist minority was far from united about taking the struggle inside the SDAP to its ultimate conclusion. Wijntkoop, Van

89 See *Cahiers over de geschiedenis der CPN*, No. 7, September 1982, 'De ideologische en organisatorische aspecten van het Tribune-conflict 1907–1909'.

90 See *Vrij Nederland*, 18 February 1984, 'Het Deventer Congres', pp. 14–15.

Ravesteyn and Ceton, who constituted the real organising head of the minority, had already resolved on a split before the congress, in order to keep *De Tribune* going. On the other hand, Gorter, who was not formally a member of the editorial board, was much more cautious. He distrusted this triad's impetuosity and did not want to precipitate a split. He hoped that Wijnkoop would moderate his position and that the Tribunists would stay in the party, even at the price of accepting the suppression of *De Tribune*, if they failed to prevent this happening at the Deventer Congress. In a letter sent to Kautsky on 16 February, two days after the end of the congress, he summarised his position: 'I have continually argued against the editorial board of *De Tribune*: we must do everything we can to draw others towards us, but if this fails – after we have fought to the last and all our efforts have failed – then we will have to yield.'<sup>91</sup>

In fact, at the extraordinary congress at Deventer, the Tribunists fought bitterly for two days and in extremely difficult conditions.<sup>92</sup> Often interrupted by Troelstra, who systematically used an 'anti-intellectual' demagoguery with his ironical references to the 'professors of *De Tribune*', and often encountering the laughing incomprehension of the congress, they remained on the offensive. They fought to maintain the revolutionary essence of the party, or the 'salt of the party' as Gorter put it. No freedom for a Marxist critique of opportunism – a freedom which existed in big parties, like the German SPD – meant suppressing the possibility of 'awakening revolutionary consciousness'.<sup>93</sup> More than anyone else, Gorter was able to express to the congress the revolutionary convictions of the Tribunists: a decisive period was opening up, a period of looming war and of revolution in Germany, which would draw the Netherlands into the ferment: 'Internationally, the period is very important. An international war looms. Then the German proletariat will make the insurrection, and Holland will have to choose its course; so the party should rejoice that it has men in it who put the revolutionary aspect of our struggle first and foremost.'<sup>94</sup>

Aware that the SDAP was sinking fast, at the end of the congress Gorter concluded with a ringing appeal for the regroupment of revolutionaries around *De Tribune*: 'Come and join us around *De Tribune*; don't let the boat go under'. This appeal was not, however, an invitation to split and set up a new party, since

91 The letter can be found in the Kautsky Archives at the IISG in Amsterdam (D XI 241). Quoted by De Liagre Böhl, 1973, p. 45.

92 SDAP 1909.

93 *Vrij Nederland*, 18 February 1984, 'Het Deventer Congres', pp. 19–23.

94 SDAP 1909, p. 20.

the Tribunists would thereby lose any possibility of developing: 'Our strength in the party can increase; our strength outside the party can never grow'.<sup>95</sup>

But this fight to remain within the party failed. Old enemies of revisionism like Van der Goes, although they refused to exclude the Tribunists, nonetheless voted to ban *De Tribune*. The 'Marxists for peace' turned 'centrist' and abandoned the revolutionaries. The split became inevitable in the name of 'party-unity'.

The congress decided overwhelmingly – by 209 mandates against 88, with 15 abstentions – to suppress *De Tribune* and replace it with a weekly, run mainly by Roland Holst. Moreover, it excluded from the party the three editors of *De Tribune*: Wijnkoop, Van Ravesteyn and Ceton. In the revisionists' view, it was necessary to cut off the organising 'head', to separate the 'leaders' from the mass of Tribunist-sympathisers in the party.

This manoeuvre failed. After the shock of the exclusion of these spokesmen for Tribunism, in the local sections the militants got back on their feet and declared their solidarity with the three editors. Very quickly, what had until then been an informal tendency became an organised group. Immediately after the congress – proof that the Tribunists had envisaged this possibility before the split – a permanent organisation-commission was formed to organise the Tribunist tendency. Members of the *De Nieuwe Tijd* group, including Gorter, ended up joining the commission.<sup>96</sup> After six weeks of doubt and hesitation, Gorter finally resolved to commit himself wholeheartedly to working with the expelled Tribunists. However, he warned against the foundation of a second party on a purely voluntarist basis.

It was, in fact, the SDAP's publication on 13 March of the party-referendum approving the decisions at Deventer that pushed those who had been excluded to form a second party. By 3,712 votes to 1,340, the SDAP confirmed the expulsion of the whole editorial board of *De Tribune*.<sup>97</sup>

In the meantime, on 10 March, before this definitive announcement of expulsion was known, Gorter and Wijnkoop had gone to Brussels. They were met by three members of the Brussels-based International Socialist Bureau (ISB): Camille Huysmans, Emile Vandervelde and Edouard Anseele, all known to belong either to the 'centre' or to the 'right'.<sup>98</sup> The aim of the meeting was to resolve the 'Dutch question'. Contrary to their fears, Gorter and Wijnkoop got a

95 *Vrij Nederland*, 18 February 1984, 'Het Deventer Congres', p. 22.

96 As did M. Mendels, who later left the SDP. The older militants like Van der Goes and Roland Holst remained in the SDAP.

97 De Liagre Böhl 1973, p. 49.

98 In 1914, all were to join the '*Union sacrée*' against Germany.

lot of understanding from the ISB: it was indignant about the expulsions agreed at Deventer, and tried to secure the reintegration of the excluded members and thus the free expression of Marxism within the SDAP. Huysmans, the secretary of the Bureau, went to the Netherlands as a mediator, to obtain the following decisions from the SDAP:

- annulment of the Deventer exclusions;
- integrating one of the excluded editors onto the editorial board of the new weekly run by Henriëtte Roland Holst;
- recognition of the Marxist minority's right to express itself.

On all these points, the leading organs of the SDAP seemed to be shaken by Huysman's opinions, put forwards on 15 March. But the previous day in Amsterdam there had been held the founding congress of the Tribunist party, which took the name SDP (Social-Democratic Party). Its foundation had thus been decided on by its members without even waiting for the results of the ISB's negotiations with the SDAP. The latter, though aware of these discussions since 10 March, had confirmed the exclusions on 13 March.

The SDP was thus born in a situation of extreme confusion. It was a small party of 419 members divided into nine sections. Its programme was that of the old party prior to 1906, before the revisionist modifications.

Wijnkoop was nominated by the congress as party-president, because of his organisational capacities. Gorter became a member of the SDP leadership. But his organisational weight was too weak to counteract the personal, even ambitious policies of Wijnkoop, who was ready to sacrifice any possibility of unity on the altar of 'his' group. Such a policy was all-too convenient for the revisionist majority of the SDAP, who wanted a definitive split with the Marxist current.

For all these reasons, the ISB's efforts to put an end to the split failed. A majority at the extraordinary congress urgently convened on 21 March, one week after the founding congress, rejected Huysman's proposal to return to the SDAP. Gorter, along with a few of the SDAP's old guard, was in favour. He judged the attitude of Wijnkoop to be particularly irresponsible, denouncing him in private as 'unboundedly opinionated'.<sup>99</sup> He was so demoralised that he even considered leaving the SDP. However, the rejection by the ISB and the SDAP of

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99 Letter from Louise Gorter to Pannekoek on 23 March 1909, quoted by De Liagre Böhl 1973. Although he could only follow the situation from a distance, in Berlin where he had been teaching since 1906 in the SPD's Party-School, Pannekoek agreed wholeheartedly with Gorter. He was against any hurried split, since he sought to win over a large part

the conditions for the reintegration of the Tribunist militants made him decide to commit himself fully to the activity of the new party.

The congress of 21 March, despite Wijnkoop's ambiguous attitude, had, in fact, left a door open to reintegration into the old party. A congress-resolution expressed the majority's desire to maintain a single party in the Netherlands. The congress therefore put forward its conditions for the Tribunists to maintain their Marxist criticism and activity within the SDAP were they to be accepted:

[The congress] wishes there to be a single Social-Democratic Party in Holland and directs the party-committee, in the interests of unity, to give itself the full power to dissolve the SDP as soon as:

- the SDAP, through a referendum, annuls the exclusion of the three editors;
- the SDAP recognises in a clearly formulated resolution the freedom of all its members or any group of members, openly, in any form, written or oral, to proclaim the principles embodied in the programme and to express their criticisms.<sup>100</sup>

The rejection by the ISB and the SDAP of these conditions, which seemed, in effect, to be an ultimatum, created a new situation in the Second International: there were now two socialist parties in the same country, both claiming membership of the International. This was an exceptional situation. There was of course the 'Russian case', where the Socialist-Revolutionary Party, the Jewish *Bund*, and the RSDLP (Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party) were all members of the International. But within the RSDLP itself, even after the split between the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks, both the two fractions and those who were outside both fractions, remained members of the same Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party, until the Prague split of 1912.

It was, however, very clear for the Marxist militants of the SDP that their party was a party of the International. The split was a local one, not a split

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of the old party. In a letter, he advised Wijnkoop to form a compact Marxist group, and even to accept 'the suppression of *De Tribune*'. Although he fully supported the new party, he was very critical of Wijnkoop and Van Ravesteyn. In his memoirs, written in 1944, he considered that the two leaders' 'sole intention was to create their own party'. These quotations (Pannekoek 1982, pp. 143–5) show how closely Gorter and Pannekoek agreed on the need to form a Marxist fraction in the old party before considering a split.

100 Congress-resolution, quoted in Gorter, Pannekoek and Van Ravesteyn 1909, pp. 44–5.



with the International itself. It was obvious for them that the International remained a living body of the world-proletariat, and that the bankruptcy of Troelstra's SDAP was in no way that of the Second International. For the SDP, as for the Bolsheviks, the 'model' party was still the German Social Democracy, to which it remained closely-linked. As a member of the SDP leadership, Gorter maintained a regular correspondence with Kautsky, at least until 1911 when the left broke with the Kautskyist centre. Pannekoek had moved to Germany in 1906 and, since the split in the SDAP, had been a member of the SPD's Bremen section, after teaching in the Party-School in Berlin.

The SDP promptly approached the International Socialist Bureau (ISB) in order to become a section of the International. Gorter and Wijnkoop were mandated to explain the reasons for the split to the ISB, on the basis of reports drawn up for the occasion, addressed to the International.<sup>101</sup> The request to be accepted as a fully-fledged section of the International led to a conflict between the left, represented by Paul Singer (of the German SPD) and the Frenchman Edouard Vaillant, and the right, whose spokesman was the Austrian Victor Adler. The SDP's admission to the International was only rejected by a small majority: Adler's resolution against admission gained 16 votes, Singer's resolution in favour gained 11 (7 November 1909).<sup>102</sup> In effect, this vote excluded the SDP from the international workers' movement, thanks to the support for revisionism from a majority of the ISB.

However, the SDP was unconditionally supported by the Bolshevik left. Lenin, who had contacted Gorter before the ISB meeting, indignantly condemned the decision of the Brussels Bureau. He had no doubt that the revisionists were responsible for the split: '[the ISB] adopted a formalist position, and by clearly supporting the opportunists, have made the Marxists responsible for the split'.<sup>103</sup> He gave his unreserved backing to the Tribunists' refusal to accept the suppression of *De Tribune*. Like them, he condemned the centrism of Roland Holst, 'who sadly displayed a distressing spirit of conciliation'.<sup>104</sup>

101 Ever since the 1904 Amsterdam Congress, the International only admitted one section in each country. To gain admission for the SDP, the Tribunists drew up a report in French: see Wijnkoop and Mensing 1985.

Maria Mensing (1854–1933) was the secretary of the *Bond van Sociaal-Democratische Vrouwenclubs* ('Social-Democratic Women's clubs').

102 See *Bulletin périodique*, No. 2, March 1910, pp. 39–42, which gives a complete account of the interventions during the ISB session of 7 November 1909. In Haupt and Winock (eds.) 1979–85.

103 Lenin 1963.

104 Lenin wrote fiercely that 'Madame Roland Holst is in my opinion a Dutch Kautsky, or

This was the beginning of an increasingly close joint activity by the SDP and the Bolsheviks. It was partly thanks to the Russian left that the SDP was finally accepted as a full section of the International in 1910. With one mandate, against seven for the SDAP, it was able to take part in the international congresses at Copenhagen in 1910 and Basle in 1912.<sup>105</sup>

Despite the manoeuvres of the revisionists, the SDP thus took its place in the international workers' movement. It was to fight alongside the international left, but especially the German left, for the defence of revolutionary principles. Temporarily, however, the Marxist tendency in the Netherlands was weakened by the split. Most of the Tribunists had proven unable to fight to the end within the SDAP, either to reconquer the party, or at least to win over the majority of workers. Their hasty split meant that the Tribunist leaders were unable to bring with them elements like Sneevliet, Roland Holst, and Van der Goes, who remained Marxists, but with a centrist 'wait-and-see' attitude. This being said, the small Tribunist party was undoubtedly a pole of clarity and regroupment for revolutionary elements.

## 11 The SDP's Activity in the Netherlands before 1914

Up until the First World-War, when it was to gain a growing audience in the proletariat, the SDP was 'crossing the desert'. It remained a small party without much influence among the Dutch proletariat: a few hundred militants against several thousand in Troelstra's SDAP. Its numerical growth was very slow and limited, despite its militant spirit: at the time of the split, the SDP had 408 militants; by 1914, 525.<sup>106</sup> In percentage terms, the 'party' had lost women militants: the SDP was 38 percent comprised of women in 1912, but 28 percent in 1914, according to *De Tribune* of 13 May, 1914. The number of subscribers to *De Tribune* was limited, and fluctuated: 900 at the time of the Deventer Congress, 1,400 in May 1909 and 1,266 in 1914. Because of its limited audience, the SDP was never a parliamentary party – though it became one at the end of the war; its participation in elections always ended in a debacle. At the June 1909 elections, it won 1.5 percent of the votes in each district. Even Gorter, reputed to be the

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a Dutch Trotsky ... in complete disagreement with the opportunists, and in practice in agreement on everything important'. See Lenin 1963, pp. 101–10.

105 *De Tribune*, 10 September 1910. Wijnkoop and Van Ravesteyn (replacing Gorter, who was ill) were delegates to the 1910 Copenhagen Congress.

106 Figures given by De Liagre Böhl, 1973, p. 58.

best orator in the party, the only one able to arouse the workers' enthusiasm,<sup>107</sup> met with a resounding failure: urged to stand as a parliamentary candidate in 1913, in Amsterdam and the industrial town of Enschede, he won 196 votes for the SDP as against 5,325 for the SDAP. But although it took part in elections, this was not the SDP's main sphere of activity, in contrast to the SDAP, which had become completely bogged down in them.

Reduced to the size of a small group, the SDP – owing to the unfavourable conditions in which the Deventer split had taken place – was unable to rally to its side the youth organisation, which had traditionally been actively and radically in the forefront of the struggle against capitalism and war. The youth organisation *De Zaaier* ('The Sower'), which had been created in 1901, wanted to remain autonomous: its sections were free to attach themselves to one or other of the two parties.<sup>108</sup> When, in 1911, the SDAP created its own youth-organisation, essentially to counteract the anti-militarist activity of *De Zaaier*, the latter broke up. The few remaining militants (about a hundred) nevertheless refused to follow the SDP, despite their common orientation.

Despite the party's theoretical solidity, there was a serious risk that the SDP would slide into sectarianism. The party's ties with the industrial proletariat had loosened since the split. Less than half of its members worked in factories or workshops; a considerable number were office-workers and teachers. The party-leadership – at least until 1911<sup>109</sup> – was composed of intellectuals, solid theoreticians<sup>110</sup> but – except for Gorter – they were often sectarian and doctrinaire. This leadership encouraged the transformation of the SDP into a sect.

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107 According to Roland Holst 1902, p. 93, Gorter was the only one able to 'touch the workers' hearts, and arouse real enthusiasm in them'. However, his bourgeois education – but also the period, when the 'leaders' of workers' parties were often far removed from the rank-and-file – kept Gorter at a distance from the real workers. One anecdote serves to demonstrate this: invited to make a propaganda-visit to the textile-town of Enschede, Gorter stepped down from the train, and calmly went to drink a coffee in a well-known café, leaving the worker Van het Reve, who had come to meet him, to wait outside. After 1920, Van het Reve was to become a leader of the CPH. See Van het Reve 1982, p. 62.

108 Ger Harmsen 1961.

109 In 1911, a number of workers entered the SDP leadership: men like Barend Luteraan, who played an active part in the '*De Zaaier*' youth-movement during the war, and then at the head of the CPH opposition during 1919–21.

110 Willem van Ravesteyn was a historian and librarian; Cornelis Ceton, a biology-teacher; Gerrit Mannoury was a famous mathematician and logician; Johannis A.N. Knuttel (1878–1965) was a member of the Philology and Literary Commission of the Dutch Literary Society, writer-compiler for the *Woordenboek der Nederlandse Taal* ('Dutch Language Dictionary').

From the outset, there was a struggle against sectarianism within the SDP. In May 1909 Gerrit Mannoury – one of the leaders of the party and a well-known mathematician – declared that the SDP was the one and only socialist party, since the SDAP had become a bourgeois party. Gorter, who had fought most bitterly against Troelstra, vigorously opposed this conception. At first in the minority, he showed that although revisionism did lead towards the bourgeois camp, the SDAP was above all an opportunist party within the proletarian camp. This position had direct implications at the level of propaganda and agitation amongst the class. It was in fact possible to fight alongside the SDAP, whenever the latter still defended a class-position, without making the slightest theoretical concessions to it.

‘Sect or party?’: this was the question Gorter posed very clearly to the whole party in November 1910.<sup>111</sup> At issue was whether the SDP was going to associate itself with a petition for universal suffrage launched by the SDAP. The SDP, like all the socialist parties of the day, fought for universal suffrage. The central question was, therefore, analysis of political struggles. At first, only a small minority, led by Gorter, supported the idea of the petition and agitation for universal suffrage. It required all Gorter’s influence for a small majority to emerge in favour of joint activity with the SDAP. Gorter explained the dangers of a tactic of non-participation, which ran the risk of pushing the party into total isolation. The tactic towards the SDAP, which was certainly ‘not a true party’, but ‘a conglomeration, a mass trooped together under a band of demagogues’, had to be that of a ‘hornet’ stinging it in the right direction. The party maintained this attitude until the war, when the SDAP crossed the Rubicon by voting for war-credits (see Chapter Three).

The evolution of the SDAP in fact confirmed the validity of the struggle which the Tribunists had waged against the revisionists from the outset. The latter were gradually being drawn into the ideology and state-apparatus of the bourgeoisie. In 1913, the SDAP pronounced itself in favour of military mobilisation in case of war, and Troelstra openly proclaimed adherence to nationalism and militarism: ‘We must do our duty’ he wrote in the SDAP daily.<sup>112</sup>

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111 ‘Sekte of Partij’, in *De Tribune*, 19 November 1910. Gorter lucidly explained that an organisation’s small size was no guarantee against opportunism, as great a danger as the opportunism of a mass-organisation: ‘Our enemies condemn the small group to impotence by exclusion: and in a small group, there is the danger that it may close in on itself. This danger threatens the small organisation, even if its principles are the best in the world. This danger also threatens our own small party’.

112 *Het Volk*, 19 May 1913.

Strengthened by its electoral success in 1913, the SDAP, which had won 18 seats, was ready to accept three *portefeuilles* (ministerial posts) in the new left-liberal government of Dirk Bos's (1862–1916) *Vrijzinnig Democratische Bond* (VDB) party, founded in 1901. The participation of Troelstra's party in a bourgeois government would have meant the total abandonment of its remaining proletarian principles; it was becoming a bourgeois party integrated into the state-apparatus. However, there was a final, weak proletarian reaction within the party: at its Zwolle Congress (known as 'the *portefeuilles* congress'), against Troelstra's wishes a small majority (375 against 320) came out against ministerial participation.<sup>113</sup> Indeed, the SDP's agitation against such participation – in the form of an open letter written by Gorter and addressed to the congress, which was never even aware of its existence – was not unconnected to this reaction.<sup>114</sup>

The SDP's activity was not limited to criticising the SDAP. It was essentially based in the class-struggle, in economic struggles and in action against war.

The international resurgence of class-struggles after 1910 encouraged the party's activity, giving it enthusiasm and confidence. Its militants took part, along with those of the NAS, in the 1909 and 1910 struggles of the Amsterdam masons, who distrusted the SDAP as a 'state-party'. In 1911, together with the NAS the party formed an 'Agitation-Committee against the High Costs of Living'. Thus began a long joint activity with the revolutionary syndicalists, which helped the SDP develop its influence among the Dutch proletariat before and during the war. This joint activity had the consequence of gradually reducing the weight of anarchist elements within the small union, which developed an openness to revolutionary Marxist positions.

One major event was to increase the audience of both the SDP and the NAS among the Dutch proletariat: the international sailors' strike of 1911. On 14 June 1911, the sailors of Britain, Belgium, and the Netherlands – joined later by the Americans – came out on strike, with the support of the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITWF) based in London. It was one of the first attempts at a general strike in an international sector of the proletariat. But many of the national organisations took no part in the strike, despite its success in some countries like Britain and Belgium. In the Netherlands, the strike revealed the profound split within the workers' movement. The NVV union,

113 De Wolff 1978, p. 121. Rosa Luxemburg, who was ill-informed on the Dutch situation, nonetheless pointed to the SDAP as an example of 'intransigence in the International, against' ministerialism. The radical attitude of Troelstra on the *portefeuilles* question' appears in his own memoirs: see Troelstra 1932, p. 211 and subsequent pages.

114 De Liagre Böhl 1973, p. 113.

attached to the SDAP, called a strike in Rotterdam, but without trying to extend it to other ports or other branches of industry such as the transport-workers, nor the dockers who were ready to come out. The strike in Rotterdam was fairly successful. In Amsterdam, however, it was less so. The NAS – affiliated to the ITWF – conducted a very combative strike, and won the active solidarity of the dockers, who came out in support. But the government, at the request of the ship-owners, ordered the occupation of the port by the police and the army, leading to bloody confrontations with the strikers. The NVV chose this moment to call for a return to work, and on 9 August the sailors were forced to go back, isolated and defeated. Responsibility for this defeat was laid at the door of the NVV and the SDAP, which had refused any financial support to those strikers who followed the NAS. Of the unions affiliated to the NVV, only the confederation of rail- and tramway-personnel (the NVSTP), led by Sneevliet, gave any support to the sailors. Sneevliet and Roland Holst denounced the policy of Troelstra and the NVV. In 1912, they both left the SDAP. However, whereas Sneevliet briefly joined the SDP, Roland Holst withdrew from organised political activity.<sup>115</sup>

The SDP's active participation, together with the NAS, in this wave of class-struggle, increased its audience amongst the Dutch proletariat. The class-struggle was growing: before 1914 the percentage of strikes that were wildcat-actions

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115 Henriëtte Roland Holst condemned the SDAP's 'treason' during the July 1911 strike of the sailors and dockers. She told Sneevliet of her intention to leave the SDAP, without joining the SDP. Sneevliet was in Berlin, and passed on the news to Rosa Luxemburg, whose answer to Roland Holst condenses her whole vision of the need for organisation within the left-Marxist movement. After condemning Roland Holst's attitude in 1909, when she left the Tribunisten isolated ('you know that I was strongly opposed to your remaining in the party while the others left'), and the split, she added that Roland Holst should either remain in the SDAP or join the SDP, but never leave the organised workers' movement:

'I thought, and still think, that you should all regroup either inside or outside: it is damaging for the Marxists to be dispersed (which does not mean that differences of view cannot exist). But now that you want to leave the party, I should do everything I can to dissuade you. You say that you do not want to join the SDP. Whether this be right or wrong, I cannot judge. But enough! You will not and cannot join the SDP. In that case, your leaving the SDAP would mean leaving the social-democratic movement! That, you cannot do. None of us can! We cannot be outside the organisation, without any contact with the masses. The worst workers' party is better than no party at all. And things can certainly change. In a few years, a period of upheaval may sweep away the opportunist dung-heap. But we cannot wait for that period outside; we must continue the struggle to the limit, however sterile it may seem'.

Quoted in Roland Holst 1935a, pp. 314–15. Luxemburg's letter is dated 11 August, 1911.

was very high: 45 percent. While remaining weak in numbers, the SDP became a political force to be reckoned with, especially during the war (see Chapter Three).

The struggle against the war had been a constant concern of the Tribunist movement even before the formation of the SDP. In a 1907 article by Van Ravesteyn, the Tribunists rejected the Second International's distinction between 'defensive' and 'offensive' wars. Wars could no longer be 'progressive'; history had changed, and it was no longer possible to use the schema of the 'bourgeois revolutions' of the nineteenth century: 'The proletariat can draw this conclusion from history, for its action today: as long as class-society and national antagonisms exist, it will always be impossible to establish a clear distinction between offensive and defensive wars. War, every war, must be fought by every means possible.'<sup>116</sup> This position, directly opposed to the conceptions of Jaurès, was wholly in accord with that of Luxemburg and the German left.

In November 1912, the SDP sent Gorter and Wijnkoop as delegates to the extraordinary congress in Basle, Switzerland, to put forwards a determinedly internationalist resolution against the imminent threat of war. To do so, Gorter prepared a speech against militarism and imperialism, parts of which were included in a pamphlet written by Gorter in October 1914 (see Chapter Three). It demonstrated not only the imperialist nature of all states – the same position as that defended by Luxemburg at the time – but also the danger of the pacifist current in the International. Significantly, its conclusion was on the unity of the international proletariat created by imperialism, a theme which was constantly taken up later by left-communism. The SDP proposed an amendment to the congress-resolution, which was rejected. The amendment called for a protest-strike should world-war break out, and was careful to distinguish this position from the idea of a 'general strike' put forwards by the anarchists. However, debates on this question were banned during the congress, and Gorter's speech could not be delivered.<sup>117</sup>

<sup>116</sup> Van Ravesteyn in *Die Neue Zeit* 1907–8, Vol. I, pp. 388–9. Like Van Ravesteyn, Luxemburg condemned the opportunist positions defended by Jaurès in his book *L'Armée nouvelle* (1911): 'Here again, we find as the basis for every political orientation the well-known distinction between defensive and offensive war, which once played an important part in the foreign policy of the socialist parties, but which, in the light of the experience of the last decades, should be purely and simply abandoned' (from the *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, 9 June 1911).

<sup>117</sup> See Gorter's October 1914 preface to his pamphlet *Het imperialisme, de Wereldoorlog en de Sociaaldemocratie* (Gorter 1914).

The Basle Manifesto did not say a word on the question of 'defence of the fatherland', nor on Jaurès's distinction between 'offensive' and 'defensive' war. In the religious atmosphere of Basle cathedral, heightened by the ringing of bells, the revolutionary voice of the SDP found no echo in the International; it was drowned out by the impassioned pacifist speech of Jaurès.

## 12      **The SDP and the Colonial Question – The Tribunists and Sneevliet in Indonesia**

As in most of the industrialised European countries, the Dutch workers' movement was confronted very concretely with the colonial question. The 'jewel' of the Dutch colonial empire was the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia), whose exploitation guaranteed the Dutch bourgeoisie substantial profits. Some hundred thousand Europeans were settled in Indonesia, among a total population of 50 million. The Dutch proletariat was faced with a bloody colonial expansion, whose single most significant episode was the long and bloody war in Aceh (Northern Sumatra), led by Muslims. The war came to an end in 1910, having cost over 60,000 Acehnese lives, as well as over 12,000 Dutch soldiers killed or dying from disease. For Dutch capital, it was vital to control the Malacca Strait after the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869. The Dutch colonial wars of 1904 to 1910, whose objective was to control all of the islands (Ceram, Borneo, Celebes, Flores, Timor, Bali), continued until the eve of the First World-War.

The growth of Dutch imperialism could be seen in the massive investments in plantations (tea, rubber, coffee, sugar, and coca) and the oil-industry (Shell), and a growing military presence.

In the mid-nineteenth century, the problem of the radical and workers' movement's attitude was posed in an individual and literary manner by the great author of 'Max Havelaar' (1860) and pamphleteer Multatuli – the pseudonym of Eduard Douwes Dekker (1820–87) – whose humanist and anarchist positions were to influence generations of Dutch Marxists. Multatuli – a civil servant in Indonesia, dismissed from the government in 1856 after accusing rich indigenous notables of corruption – denounced colonial exploitation, and raised the slogan: 'Dutch out' (*'Indië los van Holland'*). His book – famous also in the history of Dutch literature – contributed to the official abolition of slavery (1863) and of the forced 'culture-system' (1870) in Indonesia. In the 1870s, Domela Nieuwenhuis's SDB called for colonial independence, and above all the cessation of all colonial wars, in particular the Aceh war which had just begun. But a real interest in the colonial question, with the adoption of political



and theoretical positions, only appeared with the development of the Marxist movement and the Second International.

In the Second International, the colonial question was closely tied to anti-militarism, since the army was used in bloody colonial wars against the 'indigenous' populations. There was no question of a joint struggle by the proletariat of the colonial and colonised countries against world-capital. The colonial question was part of the 'national question', and not of the emancipation of all humanity from capitalist rule. This is why the responses given by the 'orthodox' and 'social-imperialist' currents in the International were situated on the national terrain: the Marxists were in favour of the formation of new nations; the revisionists defended their own countries' colonial policies dressed up as a 'socialist colonial policy' in the name of the defence of 'civilisation'.

The great specialist on colonial issues in the SDAP and the Second International was undoubtedly Van Kol, who had worked as an engineer in Indonesia. At the International's Paris Congress (1900), he proposed a resolution that committed the International not only to struggle by all means possible against the great powers' colonial expansion, but also to encourage the formation of socialist parties in the colonies. The resolution was adopted unanimously. Amongst other things, it included the idea that the struggle against a parasitic colonialism would encourage a growth in industrial production in Europe, and hence a more rapid expansion of the proletariat. This was Kautsky's position, which was shared by the 'orthodox Marxists'.

However, the SDAP leadership was soon to reveal a tendency towards chauvinism. In 1904, at the International's Amsterdam Congress, the same Van Kol proposed a resolution – adopted by the congress – calling on the socialist parties to 'oppose unflinchingly all imperialist or protectionist measures, all colonial expeditions, and all colonial credits'. The resolution also called for 'the tireless denunciation of the acts of oppression of which the indigenous populations are the victims', and to 'win for them effective measures of protection against militarist barbarity and capitalist exploitation'. But the Van Kol resolution was contradictory, on the one hand calling for 'the complete emancipation of the colonies', while on the other hand demanding 'for the indigenous population the greatest liberty and autonomy compatible with their state of development'. The conclusion tended towards a 'progressive colonialism', calling for 'an efficient exploitation of the colonies under parliamentary control'. Van Kol himself displayed a nationalist and colonialist attitude in declaring that 'there will also be colonies under the socialist state'.

This evolution towards chauvinism by the SDAP and its colonial specialist Van Kol was clearly demonstrated at the International's Stuttgart Congress

(1907), where the colonial question was linked to that of the struggle against the looming threat of war. Once again, Van Kol proposed a resolution to the congress in the name of the Colonial Commission. It declared that the Social Democracy could not condemn all colonial policy 'in principle and for all time', and that 'in a socialist system' it could be a 'work of civilisation'. It was 'colonisation as it exists today' that should be condemned, since it encouraged the 'threat of international complications and wars' and 'aggravated the burden on the metropolitan proletariat'; it was necessary to defend the 'rights of the oppressed regardless of race' – rights which would be guaranteed by an international agreement among capitalist governments ... Van Kol thus proposed a contradictory resolution, which repeated the anti-colonialism of the Paris Congress, while at the same time rejecting it in the name of a 'positive colonial policy'. It was thus possible to gain the support of the 'social-imperialist' tendency in the German party, represented by Eduard David. The latter declared that 'Europe needs the colonies', which were 'a civilising mission'. In his speeches, Van Kol made the same defence of Dutch imperialist interests, and of the need for expanding European industry to find new outlets in the colonies. There thus appeared within the International strong tendencies towards 'social-imperialism', which were to culminate in the integration of some of these parties into their national states in 1914. With some exceptions, the main representatives of these tendencies were in the German SPD and the Dutch SDAP.

It took an energetic fight within the Colonial Commission by G. Ledebour (leader of the German USPD in 1917), with the support of the Pole Karski and the Polish and Russian Social Democrats in particular, to draw up a modified resolution which rejected Van Kol's premises and conclusions. It was symptomatic of the International's degeneration – despite the adoption of the anti-war resolution – that the congress only rejected Van Kol's resolution by a tiny minority: 108 mandates for and 128 against, with 10 abstentions (from Switzerland). The Ledebour amendment drawn up by the minority of the Colonial Commission won a weak majority: 127 votes in favour, 108 against. Its interest lies not just in its reassertion of the workers' movement's hostility to capitalist colonial policy, its condemnation of all forced labour, and any exploitation of the 'natives', but also in the clear declaration that only socialism can develop civilisation, by 'offering to all peoples the possibility to develop their own civilisation fully'. It ended ambiguously – in formulations that expressed a pacifist and idealist vision – with an appeal for 'a peaceful development of civilisation, putting the wealth of the land at the service of all humanity, all over the world'. This resolution, defended by all the left tendencies in the International, was careful to separate the national from the colonial question. It was through a critique

of nationalist conceptions that a part of the Dutch left began, little-by-little, to call into question the national and reformist solutions advocated by the International for the colonial question. This was the case with Pannekoek – with hesitations and ambiguities – who rejected the concepts of 'people' and 'nation' in favour of 'class' (see Chapter Two), and laid the basis for a theory of the world-revolution, uniting in the same anti-national class-interest the proletarians in the developed world and those in the colonies and semi-colonies, in a common struggle against every bourgeoisie, including the 'native' ones.

Occupied with their opposition to Troelstra's revisionist and opportunist current, the Dutch Marxists – despite disagreeing with it – did not attack Van Kol's policy of 'socialist' colonialism in public. Wholly devoted to the great political problems that had arisen in the SDAP and in Europe, they long considered the colonial question as secondary. But the Stuttgart Congress was an eye-opener for the emerging 'Tribunist' current. The Tribunist viewpoint was laid out in an article by Van Ravesteyn, published in *Die Neue Zeit*, with Kautsky's support. The article called for independence for the Dutch colonies and support for independence-movements:

The Dutch working class has every reason to be grateful to the Stuttgart International Congress for once again declaring that colonial policy is harmful to the proletariat. Its attitude towards Dutch colonial policy can be nothing other than this: no to the colonies, in other words a declaration of independence for all our colonial empire! And until we have the ability to carry this out, encouragement and support for every attempt to put the Indonesian population in a condition to gain its independence.<sup>118</sup>

Thereafter, between the Deventer split of 1909 and 1913, the Tribunist current took little interest in the colonial question. There are almost no positions on colonialism and the proletariat's attitude towards it in the pages of *De Tribune* for these years. The SDP had just been formed, and was preoccupied, above all, with the struggle against reformism and the danger of war. Implicitly, the question of the class-struggle in Europe was far more crucial for the Marxists of the SDP. The solution to the colonial problem was to be found not in the colonies, where the SDAP proposed a reformist colonial policy – with the exception of Van Kol, who proposed to the International Socialist Bureau that forced labour and night-work should be allowed in 'hot countries'! – but in the

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<sup>118</sup> *Die Neue Zeit* 1907–8 Vol. 3, pp. 84–94.

metropolitan imperialist countries. This seems to have been the preponderant view from 1907 onwards, after Wiedijk put forwards his position in the radical-Marxist *De Nieuwe Tijd*.<sup>119</sup>

It was only in 1914 that the SDP put the colonial question back on the agenda. The intention was to firmly denounce the policy of the SDAP, which declared itself in favour of the creation of a 'modern capitalism' in Indonesia and the 'development of the colonial administration towards autonomy for the colonies'. At Wijnkoop's suggestion, the SDP's Leiden Congress (6–7 June 1914) adopted the slogan *Indië los van Holland*: the separation of Indonesia and Holland. This slogan concretised the policy officially adopted by the Second International. But the SDP's colonial policy immediately led it into ambiguities in relation to the expanding Indonesian-nationalist movement. The party declared its uncritical solidarity with the *Indische Partij*, formed in 1908 and led by Ernest Douwes Dekker (1879–1950), a distant Indonesian relative of Multatuli, in exile in Holland. It even opened the pages of *De Tribune*<sup>120</sup> to the nationalist leader, whose aim was independence in cooperation with the Asian 'elites', in other words, with the Asian national bourgeoisie (Japan). This was the forerunner of a policy subjecting the 'native' proletariat to the Asian bourgeoisie: a policy which was to be fully developed by the Comintern, and of which Sneevliet was one of the main architects.

The ambiguities of the SDP's policy on the colonial problem were laid bare when Sneevliet returned to Indonesia between 1913 and 1918. Sneevliet, who was formally a member of the SDAP until 1916, worked locally with members of the SDP. Settled in Samarang – a large port on the northern coast of Java – he entered the leadership of the rail- and tramworkers' union (*Vereeniging van Spoor- en Tram Personeel* – VSTP), the only union to admit Indonesian workers, and which was to form the proletarian base of the future Indonesian Communist Party. In May 1914, upon Sneevliet's initiative – thus applying the resolution of the Paris International Congress – there was formed the Indonesian Social-Democratic Union (*Indische Sociaal Democratische Vereeniging* – ISDV). This organisation had some one hundred Dutch members, including a few Javanese and Indo-Europeans. In 1915, it published a bi-monthly in Dutch, *Het Vrije Woord* ('Free Speech'), under the direction of Sneevliet and Asser Baars. In 1917, it published the first Indonesian-language socialist paper: *Soeara Merdeka* ('Free Speech'). The ambiguity of the ISDV's existence lay in its close relations with the nationalist organisations. Of these, the most important

119 *De Nieuwe Tijd* 1907, pp. 867–84.

120 *De Tribune*, No. 89, August 1914.

were *Sarekat Islam* ('Islamic Union') set up<sup>121</sup> by Muslim tradesmen to spread their influence over the workers and peasants, and Douwes Dekker's *Indische Partij*, founded in 1908, mostly made up of Indo-European office-workers, and renamed *Insulinde* after its dissolution in 1913. Sneevliet and other members of the ISDV also belonged to the *Insulinde* movement. In 1916 the ISDV broke with *Insulinde*, which defended a pro-Japanese policy and the nationalist slogan of 'Java for the Javanese', and allied itself closely to the *Sarekat Islam*. Indonesian members of the ISDV, like Samoen, were simultaneously members, and even leaders, of the Islamic movement. During the war, the ISDV recruited a considerable number of Indonesians from *Sarekat Islam*, which had some 20,000 members (as against 7,000 for the *Indische Partij*). One of them – briefly – was Sukarno, the future leader of the nationalist *Partai Nasional Indonesia* (PNI), formed in 1927, and president of Indonesia from 1946. This policy prefigured, in embryonic form, the policy adopted in China after 1921 – with the encouragement of Sneevliet and the Comintern – of a united front, even to the point of fusion, of nationalist and communist organisations (the *Kuomintang* and the Chinese CP). But as early as 1916, a leader of the Tribunist left, Barend Luteraan, warned against 'the error of the revolutionists' of the Western countries calling for 'support for the ideology of Islam'.<sup>122</sup>

The positions adopted by Sneevliet and his organisation during the war – against the war and in support of Zimmerwald, the Russian Revolution, and a Third International – undoubtedly demonstrated the internationalist nature of the ISDV. In March 1916, Sneevliet and his supporters left the local SDAP to join the Tribunist SDP. Thanks to the Russian Revolution, the ISDV was becoming more and more revolutionary; the right wing of the organisation split away to join the Indonesian Social-Democratic Party, the Indonesian branch of the SDAP. In fact, from 1917 onwards, the ISDV's entire activity was directed towards support for the Russian then German revolutions. The only revolutionary movement in which the ISDV took part was that of the soldiers and sailors of the Dutch fleet in Surabaya (Java's second town, on the northern coast). Sneevliet's participation in the movement led to his expulsion from Indonesia in December 1918. In 1920, the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) was formed from the ISDV and Indonesian trade-unionists linked to the nationalist movement. Significantly, within the Comintern Sneevliet represented the PKI and the 'left wing' of *Sarekat Islam*. This alliance with the indigenous Islamic bour-

121 Although formally constituted in 1912, in reality it had been founded in 1909 under the name of *Sarekat Dagang Islamiyah*.

122 *De Tribune*, October 14, 1916.

geoisie was to last until 1923.<sup>123</sup> It is interesting to note that the first secretary of the PKI was not an Indonesian, but the Dutchman Pieter Bergsma (1882–1946), editor of *Het Vrije Woord* (1920–22), who later became secretary of the CPN (1926–30).

Sneevliet's policy on the colonial question was in complete accord with that of the SDP. It expressed a constant oscillation between an internationalist orientation encouraged by the Russian Revolution, and an orientation in favour of 'national liberation', which led, in fact, to the Indonesian proletariat's subjection to nationalist Islamic organisations. This oscillation between nation and international class was summarised well in the ISDV's programme, adopted at its congress in May 1918: 'The ISDV aims to organise the proletariat and peasants in the East Indies, irrespective of race or religion, in an independent union, to conduct the class-struggle in their own country against a ruling capitalist class, thereby strengthening the international struggle, and, at the same time, to undertake the imperative struggle for national liberation.'<sup>124</sup>

It was the current led by Gorter and Pannekoek which, little-by-little, called into question the SDP's support for 'national-liberation' movements and put forwards the unity of the world-proletariat in every country, against world-capital, and for the world-revolution. Pannekoek's reappraisal of the national question in Germany was to be decisive.

### 13 The Dutch Left and Its Influence on German Radicalism

From the beginning of the century, the Dutch left had had considerable influence on the political debates within the German Social Democracy. Largely thanks to Pannekoek's personality, its influence was fast to become a decisive one in the formation and structure of the radical current, especially in Bremen (*Bremerlinke*), one of the founding nuclei of both Spartakism in 1918, and *Linkskommunismus* in 1919–20.

123 For the resolutions, proceedings, and debates on the colonial question, see the reprints (in English, French, and German) in Haupt and Winock (eds.) 1979–85.

See also Haupt and Rebérioux 1967, pp. 18–71, 212–48, and 319–32; Perthuis 1976, pp. 89–201; Tichelman 1974 and 1985; Williams 1980; MacVey 1965; Palmier 1973 and for the socio-economic background of Indonesia, see Tichelman 1980.

124 *Het Vrije Woord*, 20 May 1918.

### 13.1 *First Contacts with German Social Democracy*

The SDAP's formation took the German party as a model, and it was soon to become influential within the leadership of the Second International, particularly through its reformist leaders Troelstra, Van Kol, and Vliegen. The Marxist wing of the SDAP made early contact with the centre of German Social Democracy, represented theoretically by Kautsky who at the time was positioned on the left thanks to his defence of Marxist 'orthodoxy' against the revisionist current. After 1901, Gorter developed close political and personal ties with the 'Pope of Marxism'. Considering himself Kautsky's disciple, he often took on the task of translating the 'orthodox' leader's work into Dutch. Henriëtte Roland Holst, who had been charged to draft a resolution on the general-strike question for the International Congress of Amsterdam (1904), had been entrusted by Kautsky to write a book on the mass-strike, drawing the practical and theoretical lessons of the 1905 Revolution in Russia.<sup>125</sup> Right up until the war, Henriëtte Roland Holst was closely associated with Rosa Luxemburg, whose conceptions she shared on the issue of the mass-strike. Thanks to their political ties and their political contributions, Dutch Marxist theoreticians had a real audience in the German and international workers' movement.

But no other Dutch militant before 1914 exercised so profound an influence – both theoretical and practical – over the German radical current as did Pannekoek. Gorter's influence only appeared in 1920–21, within international left-communism. That of Roland Holst was more limited, due to her centrist position between official Communism and *Linksradikalismus*.

Pannekoek met Kautsky for the first time in April 1902, when the latter visited the Netherlands to hold conferences on Marxism. He invited Pannekoek to contribute to the theoretical review *Die Neue Zeit*. This collaboration began in 1903, and was to end in 1912, with Pannekoek disillusioned as to Kautsky's radicalism. Pannekoek's reputation in the theoretical domain was such that in 1905 the Committee for the Formation of the Bremen Union-Cartel (*Bildungsausschuß des Gewerkschaftskartells Bremen*), which had just been established by the local unions and Social Democrats, invited him to hold conferences for hundreds of workers. On 14 September 1905, Pannekoek held a conference in Bremen on the theme of 'Religion and Socialism'.<sup>126</sup> At the same time, he began

125 Roland Holst 1906. But the synthesis of all experiments of mass-strike and revolutionary strike was, above all, in her *De revolutionaire massa-actie, een studie* (Roland Holst 1918a). This book was dedicated 'to her friend Pannekoek'.

126 Pannekoek 1906a.

For Pannekoek's activity in Germany, see his memoirs (Pannekoek 1982, pp. 112–78); Bock 1975, Malandrino 1982, and Moring 1968.

to contribute to the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* edited by Franz Mehring. Mehring wanted Pannekoek to train Social-Democrat journalists and propagandists in Leipzig. Instead, in May 1906 he accepted Kautsky's invitation to give courses on historical materialism to the Party-School in Berlin, which was planned to open in November. Together with Hilferding, he had been chosen as one of the 'foreign' teachers, whose wages were paid by the Social Democracy. He thus took the conscious decision to give up his career as an astronomer, and in November resigned from his position at the Leiden observatory. He was determined to commit himself completely to the German workers' movement as a 'professional revolutionist', and so moved to Berlin.

### 13.2 Pannekoek as 'Professional Revolutionist'

There is a tendency to reduce Pannekoek to a 'pure theoretician', an intellectual who advised the revolutionary movement without really getting involved in it.<sup>127</sup> But for eight years, from 1906 until war broke out, he was a party-militant. He gave his all to the German workers' movement, both theoretically and practically. Through his contacts with German reformism and radical Marxism, this period of his life was decisive in the development of left-communist theory. It was certainly one of the most fertile for his political activity, with an abundant output of articles and pamphlets devoted to Marxist theory and the tactics of the workers' movement. Without this militant-activity, Pannekoek would never have become a leading Marxist and, indeed, an internationally-renowned one, especially at the very beginning of the Communist International. After this date, and leaving aside his purely 'councilist' contributions, his theoretical and political work was essentially one of elaboration rather than theoretical innovation. The experience of the Russian and German revolutions widened and confirmed the work of these eight years as an active militant.

Pannekoek's first political activity in Germany was thus as a teacher in the Party-School, which opened on 15 November 1906. This was jointly funded by the SPD and the 'free unions' (*Freie Gewerkschaften*). Courses lasted six months. Their aim was to give training in theory and propaganda to the cadres of the socialist and trades-union movement. For a workers' movement as powerful as the German one, the number of 'students' was extremely small: thirty at most. It is true that they and their families were financed entirely by the party for the

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127 Brendel 1970 depicts Pannekoek as a 'pure theoretician' by making practically no reference to his activity as a militant either in Leiden or in Germany. For a German translation of this book, see Brendel 2001.



duration of the course. There seems to have been no requirement of 'orthodoxy' for admission to the courses.

There was nothing scholastic about Pannekoek's teaching – and the same could be said for Mehring and Rosa Luxemburg, who also worked in the Party-School. The aim was to 'provide a clear understanding of capitalism, not only to encourage workers to fight it, but to discover the best methods of struggle'.<sup>128</sup> In both his teaching and his writing, Pannekoek highlighted the factor of class-consciousness, which he called the 'spiritual factor'.

His work at the Party-School did not last long. The police banned both Pannekoek and Hilferding – as foreigners – from teaching in Prussia. In October 1907, he was replaced by Rosa Luxemburg. Far from being discouraged, Pannekoek worked in the Social-Democratic Party with still-greater determination. Moreover, his reputation in the Party's 'leading circles' was such that Bebel himself asked him to stay in Germany and devote himself to working for the SPD. Like Otto Rühle during the same period, he became a typical Social-Democrat 'functionary', a '*Wanderlehrer*' (visiting teacher) and propagandist in the service of the national organisation. He travelled throughout Germany, including Leipzig, Stuttgart, and Frankfurt, to give courses and conferences. His travels gave him the opportunity both to evaluate the spread of revisionism and the state of mind of the rank-and-file workers confronted with the bureaucratisation of both the party and the trades-unions.

During this period, Pannekoek formed close ties with both Kautsky (he described himself as a 'Kautskyst' until 1909) and with the left-current in German and international Social Democracy. He became friends with Rosa Luxemburg and the Bolshevik Samuel Levitin.<sup>129</sup> He appreciated the 'burning revolutionary passion' of the Bolsheviks,<sup>130</sup> which he compared favourably with the pedantic and ultimately bourgeois mannerisms of the Social Democrats. It is noteworthy that, unlike Luxemburg, neither Pannekoek nor the Tribunists had any criticisms to make of Bolshevism until 1919. On the Bolshevik side, after the break between Kautsky and the radicals, Lenin asked Kamenev to make contact with Pannekoek at the 1912 Chemnitz Congress<sup>131</sup> in order to conduct the struggle against Kautsky's 'passive radicalism'.

<sup>128</sup> Pannekoek 1907, pp. 321–4.

<sup>129</sup> Samuel Levitin, Bolshevik, in exile in Berlin, studied psychology and pedagogy. He returned to Russia in 1917 to become a teacher of pedagogy. Although Pannekoek never knew Lenin in person, at the 1913 Jena Congress he had discussions with Trotsky on the Russian and international situation.

<sup>130</sup> Pannekoek 1982, p. 117.

<sup>131</sup> See Malandrino 1982, p. 540.

These contacts with the radical left were not limited to Germany and the Russian exile-milieu. Pannekoek travelled to Switzerland several times. He remained in contact with the Swiss socialist movement through Robert Grimm of Bern (the future technical organiser of the Zimmerwald Conference), and Brandler, who had settled in Zürich and was later to become one of the main leaders of the KPD. Hence the contacts with Grimm and the *Berner Tagwacht*, which were to be resuscitated in October 1914, against the war and, later, in support of Zimmerwald.

This activity was impressive enough, but Pannekoek did not restrict himself to the role of a *Wanderlehrer*. Although he declared himself to be 'not much of a man for congresses',<sup>132</sup> he took an active part in the congresses of the German Social Democracy, first as an observer (since he was a permanent party-official), and then from 1910 as a delegate from the Bremen section. At the same time, Pannekoek remained a member of the SDAP, and then of the Tribunist SDP following the split of February 1909. Together with Gorter and Van Ravesteyn, he helped to write the pamphlet addressed to the International explaining the split. When the German party refused to undertake its publication and distribution,<sup>133</sup> Pannekoek set himself up as a publisher in Berlin. It was one of the first skirmishes in the struggle against revisionism, which was to become open war after 1909.

In the end, Pannekoek's most important activity – which gave the Tribunists a considerable audience in both the German and the international workers' movement – was as a revolutionary journalist. From February 1908 to July 1914, he wrote a weekly political or theoretical article in the form of press-correspondence (*Presse-Korrespondenz*). These weekly articles were bought by the main Social-Democratic newspapers. They were published by the *Bremer Bürgerzeitung*, the spearhead of the German left-opposition. In all, he wrote 336 articles, which appeared regularly in more than twenty German papers, as well as *De Tribune* in the Netherlands and the *Berner Tagwacht* in Switzerland. Apart from the private subscribers in the Netherlands (Gorter, Roland Holst, Van Ravesteyn and Wijnkoop), it is interesting to note another name: Ulyanov Lenin, in Krakow (Austria-Hungary).<sup>134</sup>

132 Letter from Pannekoek to Kautsky (September 1910) after the Copenhagen International Congress, which he had been unwilling – or unable? – to attend. Quoted in B.A. Sijes's introduction to Pannekoek 1982, p. 16.

133 Pannekoek 1982, pp. 145–6. The *Vorwärts* print-works refused Pannekoek's request. It was out of the question to help these Dutch 'splitters'.

134 Cited by Bock 1975, p. 127. Pannekoek's articles appeared regularly in *De Tribune* from 1908 to 1914, under the heading 'Letters from Berlin'.

As well as his weekly articles, Pannekoek regularly produced theoretical articles and book- and press-reviews for the theoretical review *Die Neue Zeit* (he was its reviews-editor between 1907 and 1914). As a result of all this editorial activity,<sup>135</sup> Pannekoek found himself at the heart of the debates against revisionism and Kautsky's 'centrist' current.

### 13.3 *Pannekoek in Opposition: The 'Bremen Left' (1909–14)*

Just as Pannekoek was settling in Germany (1906), the revisionism which had been condemned in theory was developing more and more widely in the SPD's organisation, strongly supported by the unions who wanted nothing to do with either revolution or the mass-strike (see Chapter Two). The left-current came out into the open with the publication of Rosa Luxemburg's pamphlet *The Mass Strike, the Political Party and the Trade Unions*.

The Tribunist militant was naturally one of the left's strongest supporters, alongside Rosa Luxemburg, and one of the most influential 'radical' theoreticians. There was not a single question of either principle or tactics (mass-strike, parliamentarism, the trades-unions, party-organisation, class-consciousness, the question of the state, war and imperialism, the national question), where he was not in disagreement with the party (see Chapter Two). In all his texts, he analysed the change in the historic period and so affirmed the need for new tactics and new principles, not just to win increasingly precarious reforms as before, but also for the great goal: the proletarian socialist revolution.

In 1909, Pannekoek published his major work, *Die taktischen Differenzen in der Arbeiterbewegung* ('Tactical divergences in the workers' movement').<sup>136</sup> This was the first systematic critique, from the standpoint of the Marxist left, of the ideas of social democracy – but also of anarchism, which he identified with revisionism. Henceforth, the Marxist left directly confronted Kautsky, whose 'radicalism' barely hid his 'centrist' positions. In order to distinguish themselves from this 'radicalism', the Marxists described themselves as 'left-radicals' (*Linksradikale*). The antagonism between the left and the Kautskyist 'centre' deepened between 1910 and 1912, when Luxemburg and Pannekoek made public their disagreements of principle on the mass-strike, which echoed the divide between reform and revolution. The radical camp was irrevocably split in two: on the one hand, Kautskyist 'centrism', which was to culminate in the Independent Social-Democratic Party (USPD) in 1917; on the other, the

135 Pannekoek wrote not just for the German Social-Democratic press, but also for *De Nieuwe Tijd* (The Netherlands), the *International Socialist Review* (Chicago), and *The New Review* (New York). Tribunist theories were thus widely known in the USA prior to 1914.

136 Pannekoek 1909a.

*linksradikal* current, the source of the Spartakist group and the Bremen IKD ('International Communists of Germany').

The Marxist left of Bremen (a Hanseatic 'free town', and a great proletarian centre) had always been critical of the SPD leadership and the trades-unions. Pannekoek came to join them in April 1910. He was a militant in Bremen until July 1914. The Bremen party-secretary Wilhelm Pieck (future leader of the KPD after 1919, and president of the GDR from 1949) asked him to continue to work as a socialist teacher. He was paid by the Bremen *Bildungsausschuß*, formed by the party and unions. As in Berlin, Pannekoek was not content simply to give lessons on the theory and practice of the class-struggle in the town where he was living. He made propaganda-tours and held conferences throughout Germany, particularly in Stuttgart, Göttingen, and Hamburg. As a member of the opposition, this gave him the opportunity to make contact with the most radical workers, increasingly suspicious of the party- and union-apparatus. At the same time, he took an active part in the fundamental activity of the party in Bremen: meetings, distribution of leaflets; all this on top of his regular work as a revolutionary journalist, whose articles were published in one of the most influential opposition newspapers, the *Bremer Bürgerzeitung*.

The SPD's Bremen section was certainly the most theoretically advanced of all the 'radical' sections in Germany. It was dominated by the figures of Alfred Henke<sup>137</sup> and, above all, Johann Knief, a future founding member of the IKD and People's Commissar in the Bremen Soviet Republic of 1919.<sup>138</sup> The group of teachers around Knief was particularly numerous, and very active in the class-struggle. This group and the mass of factory-workers were very receptive to 'extremist' ideas. They were the most ardent in spreading the idea of the mass-strike, but also in the struggle against imperialism and the danger of war. Above all, they were resolutely opposed to the reformism of the trades-unions which, as in the rest of Germany, adopted a passive attitude to the struggle, when they did not simply forbid strikes altogether. Hence the debate, in Bre-

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137 Alfred Henke (1868–1946), tobacco-worker, became editor-in-chief of the *Bremer Bürgerzeitung* in 1906. Although he was on the left, he joined the USPD in 1917, and became president of the Bremen workers' and soldiers' council in 1919. He moved towards the right. As a member of the National Assembly, he returned to the SPD in 1922 and retained his seat until 1932.

138 Johann Knief (1880–1919), teacher, member of the SPD from 1906, editor of the *Bremer Bürgerzeitung* from 1911 until 1916. He was a founding member of the *Linksradikale*, and later of the IKD, and edited *Arbeiterpolitik*, where he worked with Radek. Knief, *alias* Peter Unruh, was imprisoned by the government for revolutionary activity in January 1918. For his biography, see Mergner 1980.

men, on the question of 'masses and leaders', which contained the seed of one of the main positions of the German communist left in 1919: the struggle of the mass against the leaders. Like Lenin, the Bremen left and Pannekoek believed that a layer had formed, made up of union-bureaucrats and employees (the 'labour-aristocracy'), which was increasingly far-removed from the class-struggle; they advocated a determined resistance to the 'leaders', through the self-development of the spontaneity of the struggle. In 1911, a significant debate on the subject took place in Hamburg. Remarkably, Pannekoek won the overwhelming support of the workers present, in his defence of the real movement against the 'leaders', despite the presence of Carl Legien, reformist leader of the 'free unions'. The result was a violent campaign against Pannekoek by the Bremen unions, and the termination of his contract with the local union-group. Although the local party-section continued to pay him and support him politically, his relations with the party-leadership were worsening. Now it was not just the right wing that tried to stifle his written propaganda, but also the centre. In November 1911, for the first time ever, Kautsky refused one of Pannekoek's articles for *Die Neue Zeit*.

The Bremen left's struggle against the Kautskyist 'centre' reached its culmination between 1910 and 1913. It provided the opportunity for a united front with Rosa Luxemburg in the debate on the question of elections and the mass-strike (see Chapter Two). In September 1910, a joint resolution was presented to the Magdeburg Congress, insisting on the use of extra-parliamentary means of struggle. This resolution in favour of the 'propaganda for the mass-strike' in the party-press and meetings was rejected by the congress. In parallel, Luxemburg and Pannekoek conducted a vigorous counter-offensive against Kautsky's 'strategy of attrition' (see Chapter Two), and his passive radicalism. At the 1913 Jena Congress, in the name of the Bremen section Pannekoek supported a counter-resolution presented by Luxemburg, which described a 'renewed interest in the mass-political strike' and – paradoxically – called for 'an all-out campaign for electoral reform'.<sup>139</sup> Pannekoek, however, placed more emphasis than Rosa Luxemburg did on the struggle against war.

In fact, the oppositions in the German Social Democracy fought in parallel, without really developing any common opposition. In 1913, there was a *de facto* split between Luxemburg and the Bremen left. This cannot be explained by the disagreements between Rosa Luxemburg and Pannekoek on the analyses contained in her *Accumulation of Capital* (see Chapter Two). In fact, it originated in the 'Radek affair'. Karl Radek had been a member of the Polish

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139 Nettl 1966.

SDKPiL, but had settled in Germany in 1908. He was accused of 'theft' by the SDKPiL leadership, and excluded. Luxemburg, this time with the support of the SPD leadership, consequently obtained his exclusion from the party at the Jena Congress. Radek, however, was one of Bremen's most active militants, and had the complete support of both Pannekoek and the local section. The result was to create a divide between Luxemburg's tendency and that of Bremen, which was to prove a barrier to the regroupment of the *Linksradiakalen* during the war.

In fact, the Bremen left was more single-minded than Luxemburg in the formation of what could look like a fraction. Radek, who had been trained in the school of Bolshevism, was more determined than Pannekoek in implicitly calling for the formation of a real fraction. During the SPD's debates of 1913 on the reorganisation of the party-leadership, Pannekoek was in favour of a 'narrow' leadership, made up of 'a small number of the party's best political thinkers'. Radek not only spoke of eliminating the parliamentary fraction from the party-leadership altogether, but even suggested the idea of forming a fraction within the SPD.<sup>140</sup>

On the eve of the Great War, the Bremen left was on the point of splitting. Politically, it was already on the terrain of 'left-communism'. Its positions against unions and 'leaders', its energetic support for any spontaneous struggle of the workers, its constant struggle against the danger of war, gave it its own distinctive character. There is no doubt that Lenin and the Bolsheviks were influenced, during the war, by Pannekoek's theoretical activity, insisting on the 'destruction of the state' by the proletariat, and by Radek's analyses of 'imperialism, the final stage of capitalism'.<sup>141</sup> The Bremen opposition's social base was the mass of workers who were in a *de facto* state of secession from the union-apparatus and the SPD. In July 1913, following the strikes in Hamburg, 5,000 workers in the Bremen shipyards came out on unofficial strike, against the orders of the trade-union. Pannekoek, Radek, and Knief gave their determined support to this anti-union action. The developing split in the party came on top of the split of the working masses from their own organisations.

As a 'foreigner', Pannekoek was forced to leave Germany in August 1914, and return to the Netherlands. In 1915, Radek left Germany for Switzerland, where he was to work with the Bolsheviks in the Zimmerwald left. But the fight was

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140 See Möller 1976 and Fayet 2004. The Bremen section published Radek's 1912 book *Der deutsche Imperialismus und die Arbeiterklasse*, which came to the same conclusions as Pannekoek on imperialism.

141 Radek analysed imperialism as 'the final phase in the development of capital': see Radek 1920, p. 72.

not over: both Pannekoek and Radek continued to follow the development of the Bremen fraction, which was expelled from the Social Democracy in 1916 and began to publish the paper *Arbeiterpolitik*. Situated at the confluence of the German, Dutch, and Russian 'left-radical' currents, the Bremen left prepared the birth of the international left-communist current, which appeared in the open in 1918–19. Pannekoek played a decisive role in the process.

On the eve of the war, the SDP – after a crisis of sectarian isolation – had undeniably developed an activity amongst the Dutch proletariat: this was not without its fruits. The SDAP's evolution towards 'ministerialism' (meaning, participation in bourgeois governments), and its acceptance of 'national defence', had undoubtedly confirmed the analysis of the Marxist current. But given the very unfavourable conditions of the Deventer split, this current remained very weak numerically: 5,000 members as opposed to 15,000 in the SDAP, which had the further support of the 60,000 members of the NVV, although it is true that the SDP had considerable influence over the 10,000 members of the NAS union. Its electoral influence was, to all intents and purposes, non-existent, and this fact, contrasted with its growing influence in the class-struggle, allowed the development after 1918 of a strongly anti-parliamentary and anti-electoral tendency, greatly strengthened by the events in Germany.

The Dutch Marxist current had a much wider audience outside 'little Holland'. In Indonesia – though very ambiguously and thanks, above all, to the personality of Sneevliet – the Tribunist current gained a growing influence among the 'indigenous' proletarian masses. The Tribunist current contributed decisively to the birth of an embryonic communist left in the Second International, and above all in Germany in contact with the German Marxist left. This weight of the Marxist left in Germany – and thus in the International – was certainly due in part to Pannekoek's intense activity in Germany. But, like Gorter in the Netherlands, Pannekoek as an individual crystallised more than a decade of organised struggle within the party against revisionism and reformism. The activity of Pannekoek and Gorter cannot be understood without reference to this struggle on both the organisational and theoretical levels. This is why we cannot reduce the history of the Tribunist SDP to that of its best-known members. The history of the SDP during the war was to show that this little party was not immune from opportunism, and that it could not avoid the political battles born of the world-war and the Russian Revolution.

## Pannekoek and ‘Dutch’ Marxism in the Second International

The Marxism of Tribuneist theoreticians like Gorter, Pannekoek, or even Roland Holst, is often portrayed as a purely Dutch phenomenon. A so-called ‘Dutch school of Marxism’ was supposedly created around these theoreticians. And this Dutch ‘school’, comprising the theoreticians of intransigent revolutionary Marxism, was often – before 1914 – contrasted with the ‘Austrian school of Marxism’, or ‘Austromarxism’, as represented by Rudolf Hilferding, Max Adler and Otto Bauer. Austromarxism was closely related to the *Marx-Studien* in 1904, and to the weekly *Der Kampf* in 1907. Both of these theoretical currents of international socialism were represented – by Pannekoek and Hilferding, respectively – in the German Social-Democratic Party’s School, opened in Berlin on 15 November 1906.

This opposition between the two ‘schools’ was no accident. While each of these currents of international socialism attacked the traditional interpretation of Marxism, laid down as scripture by Bebel and Kautsky, they did so in diametrically opposite directions. The Austromarxists liked to think of themselves as ‘unorthodox’. They ended up with an eclectic philosophical mixture of ‘neo-Kantianism’, the philosophy of Ernst Mach, psychology and Marxism. Marxism was considered more as a ‘social ethic’, dominated by the Kantian ‘categorical imperative’, than as a historical materialism based on the science of the evolution of economic and social events. In politics, Austromarxism was the incarnation of ‘centrism’, constantly looking for compromise solutions, fearful of ‘extreme’ positions, and standing midway between Bernstein’s revisionism and ‘orthodox’ Marxism. This political method of compromise and lack of intransigence on principles, was well summed up by Austromarxism’s leading light, Otto Bauer: ‘It is preferable to go a little way together, even if we take the wrong road – since mistakes can always be corrected – than to let ourselves be divided in searching for the right road.’<sup>1</sup>

Dutch Marxism’s method was altogether different. In defining itself as ‘orthodox Marxist’, the ‘Dutch school of Marxism’ rejected all eclecticism in philosophy as much as in politics. It called for a return not to Kant, but to Marx,

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1 Quoted in Rosdolsky 1973, pp. 119–74. See also Droz 1974, pp. 73–114.



whose materialist method had been continued through the work of Dietzgen. Marxism was neither teleology, nor a 'social ethic', but a 'science', insofar as its method was materialist, and thus scientific. Socialism was conceived as a necessary product of the evolution of class-society, but not as inevitable. While objective factors (decline and crises of the capitalist system) were important, subjective factors (the proletariat's class-consciousness and will) would be decisive in bringing socialism about. The latter could in no way be teleology.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, for Dutch Marxism, although socialism could not be a pure negation of 'ethics', the latter could only be explained by materialist science. Socialism was not based on 'ethics': rather, it was socialism that would engender a new proletarian class-morality on the basis of material relations of production. This morality would not be a 'categorical imperative' as the Austromarxists claimed, but a material reality springing from the struggle of the proletariat. This is why the Dutch theoreticians' Marxism could be neither a pure 'orthodoxy', nor a frozen 'dogmatism'. While the Marxist method could not be anything but orthodox, its content was, like society itself, in constant evolution, enriching itself with the living reality of the class-struggle, which would in its turn overthrow old dogmas and renew both proletarian tactics and even certain theoretical principles that had previously been thought untouchable. The experience of the class-struggle prior to 1914, characterised by the development of mass-strikes, led the Dutch Marxists to call into question the classic schemas of struggle organised solely by the trades-unions and the parliamentary party. They argued against both the eclectic and federalist revisionists and the dogmatic and conservative Kautskyist 'centre', in favour not only of greater organisational discipline and centralisation within the party, but also of greater spontaneity in the class-struggle, which could not be 'commanded from above'. Under the pressure of the class-struggle, but also confronted with the rising danger of war and nationalist ideologies, they rejected all national conceptions – and in particular those of the Austromarxists – within the workers' movement, which could only encourage nationalism and undermine the proletariat's internationalist sentiments. For all these reasons, Dutch Marxism is at the opposite end of the political spectrum from both Austromarxism and revisionism, and Kautsky's 'centrism'. The rigour of its method, and the absence of any dogmatism or conservatism, appeared, above all, as the product of the evolution of working-class struggle in the imperialist epoch. In theory and in practice, the 'Dutch school of Marxism' considered itself as a 'school' of intransigent,

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2 See Pannekoek's criticism of the neo-Kantians' teleological conceptions, in *Die Neue Zeit*, Vol. 23, 1905, No. 2, pp. 428–35, 468–73.

internationalist Marxism. Capitalism's latest development, seeking an extreme 'solution' to its crisis through world-war, meant that compromise-solutions had to be abandoned. The 'middle-road' of the struggle for reforms had to be replaced by the 'extreme' revolutionary struggle against the state, without any possibility of a peaceful road to socialism. In this, Dutch Marxism agreed with the intransigence of the Second International's Marxist left, whose most coherent expressions were Bolshevism and Rosa Luxemburg's current.

This last point explains why we think it incorrect to describe the Tribunists' Marxism, the Marxism of Pannekoek and Gorter, as a 'Dutch school of Marxism'. The Tribunist current, especially with Pannekoek's work from 1906 to 1914 as a militant in Germany, was in close contact with the Marxist left there. As early as 1909, when the SDP was created, contacts were developed with the Bolsheviks, which were to be maintained and developed in Germany, especially through Karl Radek in Bremen. Tribunism was a left-Marxist component of a radical international current, fighting against both revisionism and Kautskyst 'centrism'. In this sense, it is mistaken to speak of a 'national' Dutch expression of Marxism. Rather, there was a radical Dutch-German current which, like the Bolsheviks (and often with greater theoretical boldness), contained within itself the programmatic seeds of the 1919 Communist International.

Secondly, the expression 'school' is confusing. Pannekoek and Gorter's Marxism can hardly be defined as a particular philosophical 'school'.<sup>3</sup> It was neither a new philosophical current – since, like Marx, it rejected both classical philosophy and its modern avatars – nor was it a scholastic teaching of materialist theory. For these theoreticians, Marxism was, above all, a militant practice evolving within socialism, determined by the evolution of proletarian praxis. Their task, in the minds of Pannekoek and Gorter, was therefore not to teach, but to forge a higher level of class-consciousness within the workers' movement. Pannekoek's teaching at the Social-Democratic Party's School during 1906–7, like Rosa Luxemburg's, was neither scholarly nor scholastic. Its aim was to provide deep theoretical training for the future leaders of the socialist revolution. Revolutionary praxis was its ultimate goal.<sup>4</sup>

Finally, we must take account of the fact that Dutch radical Marxism developed in the Tribunist movement around Gorter and, above all, Pannekoek. These two were Tribunism's theoretical vanguard, far out-distancing the contributions of the organisational leaders like Wijnskoop and Van Ravesteyn. Pan-

3 *Proletarier*, No. 4, February–March 1921: the organ of the German KAPD, it presented texts by Gorter, Pannekoek, and Henriëtte Roland Holst-van der Schalk, as the expression of a Dutch school of Marxism.

4 For more about the SDP School, see the preface and annexes to Luxemburg 1972.

nekoek's contributions in the theoretical field are themselves far more impressive than those of Gorter or Roland Holst. At some moments, at a time when the personalities of the Second International enjoyed significant weight within the workers' movement, Pannekoek alone crystallised the most radical Marxism in the Netherlands, and even in Germany. However, it is impossible to understand Pannekoek's theoretical contribution without taking account of the political debate within the Second International.

## 1 The Philosophical Bases of Radical Marxism in the Netherlands

Pannekoek was led to recognise the validity of the Marxist method, considered as a scientific method of investigating social phenomena, by his own training as a scientist.<sup>5</sup> But for the Dutch left, as for Pannekoek himself, Marxism was not so much a 'pure theory' as a praxis. This current's theoretical bases did not engender a new 'philosophy' – like Marx, Engels and their successors, they proclaimed the end of philosophy – but rather laid the foundations for a vision of the world oriented towards a practical critique of existing society.

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5 Pannekoek's scientific work concentrated on the study of the structure of the 'Milky Way'. His major discoveries were: the existence of two types of red star – giants and dwarfs – at the same time as a Danish scientist in 1905; and with the Canadian John Plaskett, quantitative star-spectrography. He was one of the first astronomers of the twentieth century to use modern physical technical methods to study the stars: the use of the ionising properties of different elements to study the atmosphere of the stars; the use of photographic and photoelectric methods to define the structure of the Milky Way (our own galaxy). He took an early interest in the theory of relativity, meeting Einstein during the 1920s when the latter was an honorary professor at Leiden University. He took part in numerous scientific expeditions (Lapland and Sumatra for example), always remaining a field-worker. His scientific activity, in the form of articles, stretched from 1888 to 1957. Distinguished as a scientist of international renown – he was awarded an honorary doctorate at Harvard University in 1936, and the medal of the Royal Astronomical Society in 1951 – today Pannekoek's name is just one among many in the history of twentieth-century astronomy. He continues to be known for his work in teaching science: in 1930 he published a classic *Handbuch der Astrophysik*, but above all a history of astronomy, written originally in Dutch in 1916 and regularly reprinted since 1950. This latter is still one of the liveliest and clearest histories of astronomy ever written. Today, Pannekoek is the scientific name of a crater of the Moon. Dutch astronomers gave the name of Anton Pannekoek to the astronomical institute of Amsterdam, the 'Sterrenkundig Instituut "Anton Pannekoek"'. But Pannekoek's name survives today, too, thanks to his revolutionary political activity, and especially his Marxist writing, which has been published since the 1960s in several languages and on several continents, from Hong Kong to Mexico, from New York to Stockholm, and from Melbourne to Buenos Aires.

### 1.1 *Marxism: Science, Method, and 'Ideology' of the Proletariat*

Like every Marxist, Pannekoek and the Tribunists – following Engels – always believed that socialism should be ‘studied like a science’. This proletarian ‘science’ could in no way be confused with the natural sciences. Marxist theory ‘is nothing other than the science of society, which we owe to Marx’.<sup>6</sup> While it might use the results of the natural sciences, its field of application is class-society, and its future evolution. It is thus ‘a historical materialism and the theory of the class-struggle’, whose appropriation by the proletariat will give the latter ‘*foresight*’ into the aims and means of the struggle.<sup>7</sup>

This definition of Marxism as a science did not mean reducing it to a mere mechanical and positivist dogmatism, which – part of the heritage of the ‘rationalist’ nineteenth century – weighed on the theoreticians of the Second International, in particular on Lenin.<sup>8</sup> Pannekoek returned to Marx’s original vision, and always insisted that Marxism is defined by its scientific method of investigation: ‘Marx’s doctrine of historical materialism, better defined in its first and simplest aspect as the materialist conception of history ... is nothing other than the application of the methods of natural science to the so-called human sciences, in other words whatever concerns man and society’.<sup>9</sup>

But while Marxism is an analytical method, this method is not a rigid dogma: a ‘fixed system, or rigid theory’. The method’s validity lies in its results: ‘The materialist conception of history cannot be reduced to its method ... method and result are not independent of each other; a method’s usefulness and vitality can be measured by the results which flow from it, and without them the method can lay no claim to validity’.<sup>10</sup>

This was to emphasise that Marxism needs to be enriched and developed, which, in turn, depends on the acceleration of social upheaval. To those tendencies which claimed that Marxism could not be enriched, the Dutch left replied that both society and consciousness are being constantly transformed, more or less rapidly. In 1919, in the midst of the revolutionary wave, Pannekoek drew up a kind of balance-sheet of the profound upheavals provoked within the proletariat by the whole period of the mass-strike, and stressed that acceleration of history which had altered the conclusions of the Marxist method:

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6 Pannekoek 1906b, p. 602.

7 Pannekoek 1906b, p. 603.

8 See Chapter Seven, on Pannekoek’s book *Lenin as Philosopher*.

9 Pannekoek 1901, p. 612.

10 Pannekoek 1901, p. 614.

When, day after day, a new reality engraves itself in the mind, and forcefully drives new knowledge into heads, then the old ideology succumbs to its own exhaustion; the spirit must always abandon old opinions and adapt its ideas to new necessities. Often this happens slowly and hesitantly, with halts on the way, but still works its way through in the end. For the propagation of a new ideology constantly draws new strength from the reality of life.<sup>11</sup>

The Marxism of the Dutch left thus emerged as a new conclusion of a method adapting to the demands of a new historic period of class-struggle. The old Social-Democratic 'ideology' had become obsolete, and had to give way to the new communist 'ideology'.

This definition of Marxism and socialism as 'ideologies' – which the communist left completely abandoned after 1920 – was that of a whole historical period. In his book *The tactical disagreements within the workers' movement*<sup>12</sup> Pannekoek declared, like so many others, that 'socialism is the ideology of the modern proletariat'. This conception was ambiguous. On the one hand, this 'ideology' was seen as an emanation of the material world, 'a system of ideas, conceptions and aims, which are the spiritual expressions of material living-conditions and class-interests'.<sup>13</sup> This, said Pannekoek, could only be an abstraction, hiding the battle of ideas between proletariat and petty-bourgeoisie within the 'socialist' ideology. On the other hand, Dutch Marxism, by taking up Engels's analysis of ideology,<sup>14</sup> concluded by rejecting the term ideology as antithetical to science and real consciousness: '... an ideology is an unconscious generalisation, in which consciousness of the corresponding reality is lost, whereas science is nothing other than a conscious generalisation whose conclusions make it possible to grasp with precision the reality whence they are drawn. Ideology is thus, above all, a matter of feeling, and science of understanding'.<sup>15</sup>

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11 Pannekoek 1919.

12 Pannekoek 1909a.

13 See Bricianer 1969.

14 Letter from Engels to A. Mehring, 14 July 1893: 'Ideology is the process which the self-styled thinker carries out, consciously certainly, but with a false consciousness. The real forces which set him in motion remain unknown to him otherwise this would not be an ideological process'. Quote from Marx and Engels 1977, p. 249.

15 See Bricianer 1969.

### 1.2 *The Influence of Dietzgen*

For the Dutch Marxists, socialism thus appeared as a conscious and rational theory, scientifically based on an understanding of the laws of capitalist society. This rational vision was a world away from the neo-idealist conceptions spread by the partisans of a 'return to Kant', and from the Sorelian adepts of an irrational socialist mystique. It was equally far removed from all kinds of vulgar materialism, which transformed the proletariat's conscious action into a mere reflection of its material conditions.

Wrongly presented by its opponents as 'idealist',<sup>16</sup> the Dutch left was a Marxist current which insisted, like Rosa Luxemburg, on the importance of consciousness as a factor in the class-struggle, and defined this – using the rather confused terminology of the time – as a 'spiritual factor'. The thinker who inspired the Dutch Marxists throughout their struggle against the revisionism and mechanicism of the vulgarisers of Marxism was, undoubtedly, Joseph Dietzgen.

With the publication of his book *The Nature of Human Brain Work* in 1869,<sup>17</sup> the Social-Democratic philosopher Dietzgen (1828–88) was hailed as one of the pioneers of the materialist dialectic, alongside Marx. In his famous pamphlet *Ludwig Feuerbach and the end of classical German philosophy*, Engels saluted the identity of method between himself, Marx, and Dietzgen: '... it is remarkable that this materialist dialectic, which for years has proved our best tool and sharpest weapon, was discovered not only by us, but independently of both of us and even of Hegel, by a German worker, Joseph Dietzgen.'<sup>18</sup>

Despite this compliment from the author of *Anti-Dühring*, Dietzgen's philosophical work aroused little interest among the main theoreticians of the Second International. At best, they saw no more in it than a pale imitation of Marx, at worst a conception tainted with idealism. Franz Mehring described it as 'a dialectic lacking in knowledge', and of 'a certain confusion'.<sup>19</sup> Like Mehring,

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16 See the article in *Programme communiste* (Marseilles), the periodical of the Bordigist International Communist Party (ICP), 'On Anton Pannekoek: Marxism against idealism, or the party against the sects', No. 56, July–September 1972, pp. 18–52. This article declared that 'By making the revolution a problem of consciousness, Pannekoek and the whole German "left" stood resolutely on the terrain of idealism. The fact that this consciousness of the masses is the result of the class-struggle changes nothing'. The Bordigists then go on, apparently unaware of any contradiction, to say that 'Pannekoek's thinking represents the most complete expression of bourgeois materialism'.

17 Dietzgen 1928, with a preface by Pannekoek written in 1902.

18 Engels 1977, pp. 60–61. Dietzgen was not a worker, but a master-tanner.

19 *Die Neue Zeit*, 29 October 1909, in Mehring 1961, pp. 212–13.

Plekhanov found it confused, and with no new contribution to make to materialist theory. He saw it as an attempt 'to reconcile the opposition between idealism and materialism'.<sup>20</sup> This distrust can be largely explained by the enthusiasm for Dietzgen amongst certain idealist militants, who tried to establish – with the agreement of Dietzgen's sons – a 'Dietzgenist' theory.<sup>21</sup> In the midst of their theoretical struggle against the avatars of 'Dietzgenism' and 'Machism',<sup>22</sup> the Russian and German theoreticians saw it as no better than a neo-idealism in disguise. This opinion was far from being shared by Lenin and the majority of Bolshevik militants<sup>23</sup> who, like the Dutch left, saw Dietzgen's work as a bulwark against a fatalist and mechanical vision of historical materialism that under-estimated the factor of consciousness in the class-struggle.

Left-wing Marxists' interest in Dietzgen lay not only in his materialist critique of speculative philosophy (Kant and Hegel), but in his rejection of the vulgar-materialist conception of the brain as a reflection of matter. Dietzgen rejected the distinction made by the vulgar materialists and idealists of the eighteenth century between 'spirit' and matter. The brain was not merely a physical recipient for the experience of the senses, but, above all, the seat of thought. The 'spiritual' work of thought appeared in the construction of perceptible objects in the form of concepts grouped in a united totality. Hence his rejection of empiricism, which like idealism considers that matter is eternal, imperishable and immutable; in reality, for dialectical and historical materialism, 'matter is change, matter is that which transforms itself, and the only thing that remains is change'.<sup>24</sup> It follows that all knowledge is relative; it is possible only within certain 'determined limits'. Finally, this relative know-

20 'Joseph Dietzgen' in Plekhanov 1981b, pp. 100–16.

21 Pannekoek himself rejected the attempts by Dietzgen's sons, and others, to form a 'Dietzgenist' theory, less 'rigid' and more 'idealist than 'narrow Marxism'. In an article of 12 November 1910 'Dietzgenismus und Marxismus', published in the *Bremer Bürgerzeitung* (reprinted in Bock 1975), Pannekoek rejected the idea of an opposition between Marx and Dietzgen: 'The proletarian viewpoint is neither "Dietzgenism" nor "narrow Marxism" ... There is only one Marxism, the science of human society founded by Marx, and of which Dietzgen's contributions form an important and necessary part'.

22 See Chapter Seven of Pannekoek 1970.

23 Lenin comments in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*: 'in that worker-philosopher, who discovered dialectical materialism in his own way, there is much that is great!'.

In the same vein, in 1910 Pannekoek counterposed the Bolsheviks to Plekhanov: the latter was the expression of a mechanical and fatalistic Marxism: '... Vis-à-vis the Bolsheviks, who counterposed Dietzgen's theory, a theory of the activity of the human spirit, to fatalistic Marxism, Plekhanov expressed a sour but unfounded criticism.'

24 Dietzgen 1973, p. 90.

ledge of material reality can only operate through the active intervention of consciousness. This consciousness – called ‘mind’ – enters into a dialectical relationship with matter. There is a permanent interaction between ‘mind’ and matter: ‘Mind is dependent on things, and things are dependent on mind. Mind and things are real only through their relationship.’<sup>25</sup>

Dietzgen’s theory did not contradict that of Marx and Engels. Although often at the cost of *maladroit* terminology, it extended it by working out a ‘science of the human mind’. This ‘mind’ was a complex of inseparable qualities: consciousness, the unconscious, morale, psychology, rationality. From the revolutionary viewpoint, Dietzgen’s importance lay in his three-cornered emphasis: a) on the importance of theory as a radical apprehension and transformation of reality, and, consequently, the rejection of any immediatist and reductionist empiricism; b) the relativity of theory, which changes as social ‘matter’ changes; c) the active part played by consciousness in reality, of which it is not a reflection, but the very content. This systematisation of Marxism’s main lessons in fact represented a weapon in the fight against any reduction of Marxism to a pure economic fatalism, and against any fossilisation of the gains of historical materialism’s method and results.

All the Dutch Tribuneist leaders – Gorter, Pannekoek, Roland Holst – were enthusiastic admirers of Dietzgen, studying, translating and commentating on his work in depth.<sup>26</sup> The insistence on the role of ‘mind’ and the ‘spiritual’ in the class-struggle was a direct call for workers’ spontaneity against the rigid framework of the Social-Democratic and trade-union bureaucracy. It was a direct call to struggle against revisionist doubts and fatalism, which saw capitalism as ‘eternal’ and ‘imperishable’, following the viewpoint of bourgeois materialism. Above all, it was an appeal to the working class’s energy and enthusiasm in the struggle against the existing régime, a struggle which demanded conscious will and a spirit of sacrifice for the cause – in short, intellectual and moral qualities. The Dutch Marxists found, or thought they found, this call for a new proletarian ‘ethics’ in Dietzgen.<sup>27</sup> Dietzgen, they felt, had done no more than reveal

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25 Dietzgen 1973, p. 71.

26 Gorter translated Dietzgen into Dutch, while Pannekoek wrote a commentary: ‘The place and meaning of Josef Dietzgen’s philosophical work’ (Pannekoek 1906c). Henriëtte Roland Holst also wrote a study (Roland Holst 1910). This latter work is a long résumé of Dietzgen’s texts, which strongly focuses on his notion of ‘morale’, and attacks Plekhanov in passing.

27 Dietzgen 1973, p. 183: ‘Our combat is not directed against morality, nor even against a certain form of morality, but against the claim that a particular form of morality is an absolute form, morality in general’.



the meaning of a Marxism whose advances had been hidden and deformed by the reformist and revisionist viewpoint.

Nonetheless, there was disagreement within the Dutch left on the interpretation of the role of 'spirit' in the class-struggle. Roland Holst's interpretation of Dietzgen was nothing less than idealist, a mixture of enthusiasm and morality, a religious vision which minimised the use of violence in the struggle against capitalism.<sup>28</sup> The far-more materialist Gorter was won to a more voluntarist interpretation, focused on so-called 'spiritual' subjective conditions:

The spirit must be revolutionised. Prejudices and cowardice must be extirpated. The most important thing of all is spiritual propaganda. Knowledge, spiritual strength: this is what comes first; this is what is most necessary. Only knowledge gives us a good organisation, a good trade-union movement, and a correct policy, and thereby political and economic improvements.<sup>29</sup>

Gorter, who has sometimes been described as idealist and a 'visionary',<sup>30</sup> took great care to give the term 'spiritual' a militant content, excluding any fatalism:

The social force that drives us is not dead fate, an intractable mass of matter. It is society; it is a living force ... We do not make history of our own free will. But ... we do make it.<sup>31</sup>

For Pannekoek, by contrast, the spiritual factor finds its expression in the development of theory. This is both a method of 'pure' thought and knowledge, and a practical, rational consciousness, whose role is to free the will from

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28 This minimisation of class-violence as a material factor appears frequently in two of Henriëtte Roland Holst's main books: *De revolutionaire massa-actie. Een studie* and *De strijdmiddelen der sociale revolutie* (Roland Holst 1918a and 1918b, respectively). For her, mass-action is not 'violence', and she often uses the ambiguous term 'spiritual violence'.

29 Gorter 1909b, p. 111.

30 See: 'Gorter, Lénine et la Gauche', *Programme communiste*, Nos. 53–4, Paris, October 1971–March 1972. This article describes Gorter as an '*illuminist*' ('visionary'), in the sense that he is claimed to be attached to the current of ideas represented by the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, in the form of 'Clarification' (*Aufklärung*). In fact, the Bordigist current constantly confuses Gorter's and Pannekoek's ideas with those of Gramsci for its own polemical ends.

31 Gorter 1909b p. 127; with a highly complimentary foreword by Kautsky, translation from Dutch into German by Anna Pannekoek-Nassau Noordewier (1871–1957), wife of Anton since 1903, who was teaching Dutch in Leiden.

the all-powerful, direct influence of the instincts, and subject it to conscious, rational knowledge. Theoretical awareness allows the worker to escape from the influence of immediate and limited interests, and to align his action to general proletarian class-interests and the long-term interest of socialism.<sup>32</sup> For Pannekoek, the role of the 'spirit' lies within that 'science of the mind' which is the development of critical and scientific weapons against bourgeois ideology.

### 1.3 *The Struggle against Ideology: Marxism against Darwinism and neo-Kantism; the New Ethics of the Proletariat*

One of the Dutch left's main theoretical battles in the period prior to 1914, was fought against any claim to use Darwin's theories as a biological basis for the class-struggle. While demonstrating that 'Marxism and Darwinism form part of a whole' on the level of materialism, the Dutch left emphasised the profound differences between them, since 'the one deals with the animal world, the other with that of human society'.<sup>33</sup> Above all, they showed how 'social Darwinism' was a weapon of bourgeois ideology, in its materialist form, against the power of the Church and the aristocracy as well as against the proletariat. In Germany especially, it had served 'as a weapon of the bourgeoisie in its struggle against the aristocracy and the priests, because it replaced divine intervention with the interplay of natural laws'.<sup>34</sup> These natural laws of the struggle for existence, transposed from the animal kingdom to human society, were, in fact, the 'scientific foundation' for the inequality of bourgeois society. Pannekoek showed that language, thought, and consciousness are specific to humanity, whose 'struggles cannot be fought on the same principles as the animal kingdom', and emphasised the difference between bourgeois materialism and socialism, between the defence of inequality and its total elimination:

Socialism's fundamental premise is the natural equality of men, and it aims to bring about their social equality ... This means that the struggle for existence within the human world will come to an end. It will still be fought, but against external forces, not as a competition against one's fellows, but as a struggle for survival against nature.<sup>35</sup>

On the road to the proletariat's emancipation of humanity, social feelings would become '*clearly conscious*', and so assume the character of moral feelings.

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32 Pannekoek 1909a, p. 97.

33 Pannekoek 1914, p. 24.

34 Pannekoek 1914, pp. 15–18.

35 Pannekoek 1914, pp. 20 and 44.

The struggle for socialism would take expression in a new, proletarian, morality, which would put an end to 'the war of each against all'. In this, Pannekoek was in complete agreement with Marx and Engels, who, after initial enthusiasm for Darwin, expressed very clear reservations about his theories.<sup>36</sup>

Like Dietzgen, the Dutch Marxists' struggle for a new proletarian, socialist 'ethics' did not represent adherence to neo-Kantian idealism. On the contrary, they saw neo-Kantism as the philosophical basis for revisionism, which reflected 'petty-bourgeois tendencies', and allied 'a bourgeois conception of the world with anti-capitalist convictions'.<sup>37</sup> Pannekoek vigorously emphasised the impossibility of reconciling idealist and revisionist 'ethics' with historical materialism; the latter provides the foundations for a new, proletarian morality, but on a materialist basis of capitalist exploitation and the struggle against the domination of the bourgeoisie. In an article written in 1911, Pannekoek shows how wrong it is to seek to transform Marx into a moralist, or 'ethicist', and so transform the class-struggle into a struggle for abstract 'ideals':

Marx's materialist theory does not deny ethics, any more than it denies the power of ethical feelings. It does deny that these feelings are rooted in an 'ethics' standing somewhere above humanity; it considers ethics as being themselves a product of material social factors. The virtue which is today growing among the workers, their solidarity and discipline, their spirit of sacrifice and their devotion for the class community and social-

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36 On 16 January 1861, Marx wrote to Lassalle:

'Darwin's book is very important and serves me as a natural scientific basis for the class struggle in history. One has to put up with the crude English method of development, of course. Despite all deficiencies, not only is the death-blow dealt here for the first time to "teleology" in the natural sciences but its rational meaning is empirically explained.'

In 1871 Marx sent Darwin a copy of the first volume of *Capital*. Darwin replied that he did not have enough time to study it, that the topics which the pair were investigating were very different and that he did not understand political economy. Engels was to correct this opinion later:

'The whole Darwinian theory of the struggle for life is simply the transference from society to organic nature of Hobbes' theory of *bellum omnium contra omnes*, and of the bourgeois economic theory of competition, as well as the Malthusian theory of population. When once this feat has been accomplished (the unconditional justification for which, especially as regards the Malthusian theory, is still very questionable), it is very easy to transfer these theories back again from natural history to the history of society, and altogether too naïve to maintain that thereby these assertions have been proved as eternal natural laws of society' (Engels 1987, p. 584).

37 Pannekoek, introduction to Dietzgen 1973, p. 38.

ism, are a fundamental precondition for the suppression of exploitation; without this new morality of the proletariat, socialism cannot be the goal of the struggle ... The idea that Marx is an ethicist is doubly wrong. It is not ethics that lies at the foundation of Marxism. On the contrary, it is Marxism that gives ethics a materialist foundation. And the violent passion of criticism and struggle that flames in Marx's writing has little to do with ethics.<sup>38</sup>

In a pamphlet designed to aid the fight against anarchism and revisionism, which saw the struggle against capitalism as a struggle against 'injustice', Pannekoek showed that the Marxist method has nothing in common with the idealist method of categorical imperatives. Capitalism reveals its unjust nature by becoming obsolete, and so creating the objective basis for its own disappearance. From the materialist point of view, it is incorrect 'to say that capitalism must be overthrown and replaced by a better social order because it is bad and unjust. On the contrary, it is because capitalism can be overthrown, and because a better order is possible, that it is unjust and bad'. From this point of view, socialism's aim is not 'to make men morally better by preaching at them, but to overthrow the social order'.<sup>39</sup>

Pannekoek thus stresses that any new morality arising from the proletarian struggle must be subjected to this goal. Pannekoek was enormously impressed by the 1903 strike in the Netherlands. With Gorter (in the bitter polemic against Troelstra) (see Chapter One), he demonstrated that what was 'moral' was 'anything that serves the class-struggle', while the immoral is 'anything that damages it'. In the class-struggle, 'proletarian morality' does not mean anything that is immediately 'useful' and 'rational' for its action – like so many others, the 1903 strike ended in defeat – but whatever helps to strengthen it in the long term. However, in a somewhat contradictory reasoning, Pannekoek shows that class-interests and morality often diverge, since 'it is not that which is useful to the class that is moral; on the contrary, that which in general is normally directed towards the advantage and interests of the class is moral'.<sup>40</sup>

Significantly, Pannekoek and the Dutch left were gradually to abandon this paradigm, which was clearly marked by the debate against the revisionists

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38 Pannekoek, 'Marx der Ethiker', in *Bremer Bürgerzeitung*, 25 February 1911. Pannekoek was to repeat his insistence that Marx was no 'ethicist' at the end of his life, in letters to Maximilien Rubel, for whom Marxism could be reduced to a 'system of ethics'. See: 'Lettres d'Anton Pannekoek 1951–1955', in Rubel (ed.) 1976, pp. 841–932.

39 Pannekoek 1906b, pp. 9, 19.

40 Pannekoek 1906b, p. 21.

and the neo-Kantians. Especially after 1905, the fundamental problem for the Dutch left was no longer the question of 'proletarian morality', but of class-consciousness. In the end, the proletariat's real 'morality' lies in the formation and strengthening of its class-consciousness, as a precondition of the socialist goal.

#### 1.4 *The Dutch Left's Conception of Class-Consciousness*

For the Marxist left, the proletariat's strength did not lie in its numbers, concentration and economic importance alone. It became a class, both in and for itself, from the moment that it became aware not just of its strength, but of its own interests and goals. It is consciousness that brings the working class into existence. The class is self-aware: 'It is only thanks to consciousness that weight of numbers is transformed into a force for the class itself, and that the latter is able to grasp that it is vital to the productive process; only thanks to consciousness can the proletariat fulfil its interests and achieve its aims. Only class-consciousness makes it possible for this inert, immense and muscular body to exist and become capable of action.'<sup>41</sup>

Pannekoek and the Dutch left followed the classical-Marxist movement in highlighting differing degrees of class-consciousness, which can only be understood historically. At first, class-consciousness is neither complete, nor 'adjudged' – to use Lukács's formulation<sup>42</sup> – as it would be, conditionally and ideally, had it reached maturity. The primitive form of class-consciousness, indispensable for struggle, is the 'mass-instinct', or 'class-instinct'. While demonstrating that this instinct is demonstrated through spontaneous action, 'action determined by immediate feeling as opposed to action based on intelligent thought', Pannekoek declared that 'the instinct of the masses is the lever for humanity's political-revolutionary development'.<sup>43</sup> This assertion may seem somewhat paradoxical, since it seems like a glorification of gut 'class-instinct'. In fact, this was not the case. For Pannekoek, this instinct was 'immediate class-consciousness', which had not yet reached a political and socialist form. In polemics against the revisionists and Kautskyists (see below), the Marxist left often emphasised the 'firm, living' class-instinct, meaning by this the workers' class-interests, which were paralysed by the bureaucratised party- and trade-union apparatus.

<sup>41</sup> Pannekoek 1909a, quoted in Bricianer 1969, p. 56.

<sup>42</sup> Lukács 1960, p. 73.

<sup>43</sup> Pannekoek, 'Der Instinkt der Massen', *Bremer Bürgerzeitung*, reprinted in Bock 1975, pp. 137–140.

Although it has often been accused, along with Rosa Luxemburg, of a form of spontaneism (in particular by the 'Leninist' current represented above all by Bordiga's followers),<sup>44</sup> for the Dutch left there was nothing 'spontaneous' about class-consciousness; they had no 'mystique' of unplanned action along the lines of Sorel. Insisting that class-consciousness is neither a group-social psychology nor an individual consciousness, the Dutch Marxists put forwards a definition which is far removed from 'spontaneism':

- Consciousness within the proletariat is a collective will, organised as one body; its form is necessarily the organisation which gives unity and cohesion to the exploited class:

... the organisation groups together in one framework individuals who were previously atomised. Before the organisation, each individual's will was expressed independently of all the others; the organisation means the unity of all individual wills acting in the same direction. As long as the different atoms are moving in any direction, then they neutralise each other, and the sum of their activity is equal to zero.<sup>45</sup>

- This consciousness is not a pure reflection of the proletariat's economic struggles. It takes on a political form, whose highest and most developed expression is socialist theory, which allows the proletariat to go beyond the 'instinctive' and still unconscious stage, to reach the stage of conscious action, directed by the communist goal: 'Theory is socialism's scientific foundation. Putting it into action will make the greatest contribution both to giving the movement a sure and steady direction, and to transforming unconscious instinct into conscious human action.'<sup>46</sup>

To this theory and concept of organisation, which he sometimes referred to as 'knowledge', Pannekoek would add freely-accepted discipline as the cement of consciousness.

As we can see, this conception of the Dutch Marxist left is as far removed from that of Lenin expressed in *What is to be Done?*, which argued that consciousness had to be injected from the outside by bourgeois intellectuals, as

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44 This is the point of view of the Leninist 'fundamentalist' current, organised in Bordigist groups.

45 Pannekoek, 'Massenaktion und Revolution', in *Die Neue Zeit*, Vol. 30, 1911–12, No. 2, pp. 541–50, 585–93, 609–16; reprinted in Grünenberg 1970.

46 Pannekoek 1909a, quoted in Bricianer 1969, p. 98.

it is from the spontaneist, anti-organisational and economistic current. The Dutch left was convinced that class-consciousness existed in two dimensions: the theoretical depth of 'knowledge' accumulated by historical experience, and its penetration amongst the masses. Increasingly, the Dutch and German lefts emphasised the importance of the mass-strike, at one and the same time 'spontaneous' and 'organised', to the mass-development of class-consciousness.

This position was, in fact, directly derived from Marx's theory of consciousness.<sup>47</sup> Despite appearances, after 1905 and the first Russian revolution it differed little from that of Lenin, for whom 'class-instinct', 'spontaneity' and socialist education were inseparably linked: 'The working class is instinctively, spontaneously social-democratic, and more than 10 years of work by the social democracy has done much to transform this instinct into consciousness.'<sup>48</sup> There was thus within the pre-1914 Marxist left a clear convergence of understanding of the question of class-consciousness.

## 2 The Ideological Obstacles to the Proletarian Revolution

In order to arrive at a socialist awareness of its goal, the proletariat had to free itself of a certain number of ideological barriers that appeared within itself. For the Marxist left, the struggle on the ideological terrain, against the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois ideas that insidiously penetrate the proletariat, was just as vital as the practical class-struggle against the bourgeoisie.

### 2.1 Religion

The Dutch left never considered the relationship between religion and socialism as merely a matter for philosophical debate. Tribuneism's first concern (see Chapter One) was to distinguish itself from the revisionists in the SDAP and the unions, whose 'neutrality' in this respect in fact concealed and reduced to silence the Marxist critique of religion; its second was to distinguish itself from bourgeois anti-clericalism, which was often – as in France, for example – supported by elements of the socialist movement, and whose effect was to lead the

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47 As Marx writes in Part I of the *German Ideology*, 'To produce this communist consciousness massively, and to bring about the triumph of the cause itself, a transformation is necessary which affects the mass of humanity, and this can only take place in a practical movement, in a revolution.' Marx continues that the working class is the class from which emanates consciousness of the necessity of a fundamental revolution, a communist consciousness.

48 Lenin 1961.

proletariat onto a foreign terrain, in other words into alliances with the bourgeoisie's 'radical' wing, and away from the specific terrain of the working class, the class-struggle.

The thesis defended by the Dutch left in Pannekoek's 1906 pamphlet *Religion and socialism* was new to Social Democracy, and seemed surprising given the fact that important sectors of the working class were still dominated by religion. According to Pannekoek, 'in today's modern proletariat, irreligion is becoming a mass-phenomenon'.<sup>49</sup> Religion, defined as 'the belief in a supernatural being who supposedly rules the world and controls human history', was disappearing from the proletariat. Only the ruling classes, having in their ascendant period been anti-religious and materialist (in the bourgeois sense) were becoming receptive to religion. The latter was taking refuge in the ruling classes, confused and assailed by doubts as to their system's viability. This new bourgeois religiosity expressed the bourgeoisie's 'false consciousness', for which capitalist society is an 'incomprehensible domain full of secrets'.

The political conclusion drawn by Pannekoek was that the revolutionary proletariat should not take its stand simply on the terrain of struggle against religion. The problem was not one of 'guiding men towards a new religious faith', or an 'irreligious unbelief', but of guiding the proletariat towards the 'taking in hand of social and political power'. In this sense, the proletariat should be not 'irreligious', but 'non-religious'. The pamphlet's analysis, which criticised classical-bourgeois eighteenth-century materialism entirely orientated towards the critique of religion, was judged harshly by Plekhanov, who saw it as 'extremely suspect'.<sup>50</sup> In fact, the opposition between Pannekoek and Plekhanov – and later Lenin – foreshadowed the debate on bourgeois materialism during the 1930s, around Pannekoek's *Lenin as Philosopher* (see below, Chapter Seven).

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49 Pannekoek 1906, pp. 7 and 27.

50 Plekhanov 1981a. Plekhanov's criticism is riddled with quibbling pedantry. Pannekoek is said to write 'very bad articles' for the *Neue Zeit*, and not to have understood that religion is 'belief in one or several gods', not 'in a supernatural being'. 'Pannekoek knows nothing about the historical process of the emergence of religions'. In fact, behind this 'demolition' of Pannekoek lie two major disagreements. The first is Pannekoek's assertion that 'the class in question is becoming less and less religious'. The second, and the more important, lay in Plekhanov's defence of eighteenth-century bourgeois materialism: '... "bourgeois materialism" was limited compared to today's dialectical materialism. But there can be no question of opposition between them. "Bourgeois materialism", or more precisely, the classical materialism of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, has not been "forgotten", as Pannekoek would have it, but has been born again in the "system" of Marx.'



The Dutch left's vision was unquestionably orientated entirely towards the essential question for Marxism: the development of the class-struggle towards the seizure of power. However, it remained within the framework of the Social Democracy, considering that for workers and members of the party, religion should remain a 'private affair' (*Privatsache*): 'This is why in our party, religion is considered as something private. This means that we do not demand from any of our comrades in the struggle, a profession of faith on particular opinions in this domain; still less do we require that they should demonstrate their belief in Marx's theory of value, although we all recognise without hesitation this theory's great importance for our movement.'

While emphasising that there should be no sign of 'weakness' or 'tolerance of opportunist attitudes' towards religion, Pannekoek made a principle of 'neutrality' in this respect. Not without ambiguity – which, indeed, was common to the whole Social Democracy at the time – he declared that socialism does not show 'any hostility towards religion, which – thanks to our historical-materialist viewpoint – we can understand and evaluate as temporarily necessary'.

This conclusion, which counted on the gradual disappearance of religious illusions within the proletariat, could seem like an under-estimation of religion's weight within the working class, and especially within the Social-Democratic parties, whose statutes allowed the membership of religious persons, since personal beliefs were a 'private affair'.<sup>51</sup>

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51 Like other Social-Democratic leaders, Lenin too considered that religion was a 'private matter' within the party, and that religious workers should not be prevented from joining it: 'We should not only admit to the Social-Democratic Party those workers who still retain faith in God, but work to attract them to the Party'; he added that 'we attract them in order to educate them in the spirit of our program, not so that they should actively combat it'. But he emphasised that Social Democracy's 'indifference' to religion – one of a kind with bourgeois anti-clericalism, 'as a means to turn the masses' attention away from socialism' – had 'engendered a new deformation of Marxism in the opposite direction, towards opportunism'. Religion could be a 'private concern' within the party, but not in socialist propaganda; the idea of religion as a 'private concern' only had any meaning alongside the demand for the suppression of all state-religions: 'The party of the proletariat demands that the state should proclaim religion a private affair, without in the least considering that the struggle against the 'opium of the people' and against religious superstition is a private affair. The reformists have deformed things so far as to pretend that the social-democratic party considers religion a private matter!' Like Pannekoek, Lenin nonetheless stressed the danger of focusing propaganda on atheism and giving it an exaggerated importance '... this would threaten to lead the proletariat's political party to exaggerate the struggle against religion; it would lead to removing the dividing line

But it is true that, for the Marxist left, the religious question seemed secondary in the ideological struggles of the time. For the whole workers' movement, much more was at stake in the theoretical struggle against revisionism and anarchism. And there was little sign then of the first symptoms of capitalism's decline, expressed in the 'religion of the state' and a resurgence of mysticism.

## 2.2 *Revisionism and Anarchism*

From the outset, the Dutch Marxists' theoretical and practical struggle was directed against a powerful revisionist, reformist, and opportunist current in the SDAP and the German SPD. But this was always combined with a parallel struggle against anarchism.

The Marxist left was in no doubt that anarchism and revisionism were both 'bourgeois tendencies within the workers' movement'.<sup>52</sup> The revisionism defended by Bernstein, Troelstra, and Vliegen was in practice drawing ever-closer to the 'bourgeois reformers and radicals'. Anarchism, by contrast, precisely because of its 'utopian phraseology' was 'more dangerous' than revisionism. Although these two tendencies appeared to be diametrical opposites, in fact revisionism and anarchism were symmetrical. For the anarchists, the state was the 'devil', while for the revisionists it was the 'fairy-godmother'. For the former, the goal was everything and the movement nothing, while for the latter 'the final goal is nothing, the movement is everything'.<sup>53</sup> In fact, they strengthened each other: 'anarchist phraseology' strengthened the revisionist 'reaction', while revisionist practice, such as the policy of alliances with the bourgeoisie illustrated in France by 'Millerandism' 'considerably strengthened the anarchist current in the trade-union movement'.<sup>54</sup>

But the Dutch left went further than identifying symmetry between these 'bourgeois tendencies': they emphasised their common roots in a bourgeois conception of the world. Both joined bourgeois liberalism in a 'common cult of the individual and personal liberty'.<sup>55</sup> Both stood on the terrain of the bour-

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between the bourgeois and the socialist struggle against religion' (Lenin 1977, pp. 402–13).

52 Pannekoek 1909a, quoted in Bricianer 1969, p. 71.

53 Pannekoek 1906b, pp. 609–13. This article is the first draft for Pannekoek 1909a.

54 Pannekoek 1906b, p. 611. 'Millerandists' are socialists who take office in bourgeois governments, named after the French Socialist leader Alexandre Millerand (1859–1943) who joined the Waldeck-Rousseau cabinet in 1899, alongside the Marquis de Galliffet who had directed the repression of the 1871 Paris Commune.

55 The quotes that follow are drawn from Pannekoek 1909a, quoted above.

geoisie, but while anarchism adopted the ideology of the rising bourgeoisie, revisionism adopted that of the bourgeoisie in decline. They thus expressed two different periods of bourgeois development: 'Anarchism, continuing the tradition of the bourgeois revolutions, thinks of nothing but staging revolutions, while revisionism adopts the theory of slow evolution, which belongs to the decadent bourgeoisie.'

This analysis may seem contradictory. On the one hand, the left asserted that these were 'bourgeois tendencies', on the other that they were 'petty-bourgeois, rather than bourgeois tendencies'. In fact, with the rest of the Marxist left, the Dutch left did not consider anarchism and revisionism as being integrated into the bourgeoisie. Ideologically, they were situated on a bourgeois terrain, but socially they expressed the penetration of petty-bourgeois ideology within the workers' movement. Anarchism and revisionism were the political expression of a class without any future, oscillating between extremes:

... unlike the self-satisfied big bourgeoisie, the petty-bourgeoisie has always been a class of malcontents, inclined to resist the existing order. Social development offers no perspective to this class; unable to keep up, it inevitably falls into one excess or another; either it gets drunk on revolutionary phrases and desires to seize power through a *putsch*; or it crawls shamefully at the feet of the big bourgeoisie, trying to beg or trick reforms out of it. Anarchism is the ideology of the petty-bourgeois gone mad, revisionism that of the petty bourgeois when he has been tamed.

These oscillations explain how – as we saw in the example of the German *Jungen* (Chapter One) – each can be transformed so easily into its opposite.

But the very fact that revisionism had a substantial base in the trades-unions, and that anarchism was losing its purely individualist aspect – to be transformed into anarcho-syndicalism, which in some countries was anchored in a milieu of organised workers – made this analysis incomplete. The petty-bourgeoisie's psychology, its oscillations between rage against, and submission to, the existing order, illuminated but did not sufficiently explain the historical phenomenon of the development of revisionism and anarcho-syndicalism.

In fact, the Dutch Marxist left did not have a homogeneous vision; its analysis was hesitant. In a pamphlet on *Social democracy and Revisionism*, published in 1909 in the midst of the split with the SDAP, Gorter asserted that revisionism and anarchism shared the same historic and economic roots: absence of heavy industry, an economy of small businesses and the peasantry. Like anarchism, it was a sort of 'transitional stage' before the formation of a combative

industrial proletariat.<sup>56</sup> This kind of explanation was too closely tied to the Dutch situation to be convincing. By summarily identifying revisionism and anarchism, Tribunists like Gorter hoped to avoid the accusation of anarchism by their political adversaries. Pannekoek, in his book *Die taktischen Differenzen in der Arbeiterbewegung* (also published during the split, in 1909), came closer to the truth. He showed that revisionism was a universal phenomenon in the international workers' movement, but one which reached its fullest extent in developed countries like Germany. The basis for revisionism lay in the appearance of a social stratum identified entirely with trade-union and parliamentary activity. Above all, the mass unions' 'ideal is not a socialist order, but liberty and equality within the bourgeois state', and they are the tool of a bureaucracy which is completely detached from the working class.<sup>57</sup> Pannekoek called this bureaucracy the 'labour-aristocracy'. It was not so much a social stratum as a caste of 'leaders' extending their domination over the working masses.

This form of the theory of a 'labour aristocracy' was not new. It had already been sketched out by Engels, but in a polemical way, and only to be relegated to the warehouse of theoretical accessories.<sup>58</sup> It was taken up again in the Second International, and especially systematised by Lenin during the First World-War. There were obvious similarities between the conceptions of the Dutch left and those of Lenin. On the one hand, anarchism was analysed in its anarcho-syndicalist form as the price the workers' movement had to pay for the opportunism in the Second International; on the other, the 'workers' leaders' and the 'labour-aristocracy' were considered the vehicles of the revisionist current.

But there, the likeness ended. Following the debate on the mass-strike, against Kautsky and 'centrism' – which revealed the reformist current's general penetration of every layer of the working class, both 'poor' and 'aristocratic' – Pannekoek no longer used the concept of 'labour-aristocracy'. As for anarchism, the Dutch left's position remained the same: hostility on principle, and permanent theoretical struggle. The Dutch left's rejection of the anarchist cur-

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56 Gorter 1909a, p. 3.

57 Pannekoek 1909a, p. 84.

58 Engels first spoke of a 'labour-aristocracy' with reference to highly-qualified workers, organised in corporatist unions and hostile to the organisation of unqualified workers, especially in Britain. But in 1885, in an article in *Die Neue Zeit*, Engels predicted the disappearance of this British 'layer' of 'privileged' workers as a result of the economic crisis: 'With the ruin of Britain's industrial supremacy, its working class will lose its privileged status. On the whole – including its privileged and leading minority – it will be brought to the same level as workers abroad' (Marx and Engels 1972, p. 193).

rent was only tempered by the development of the class-struggle, and the part played by anarcho-syndicalist militants like the NAS in the Netherlands. In fact, the Dutch left, and especially Pannekoek, made a clear distinction between the French 'revolutionary syndicalism' embodied in Sorel, and the American IWW. Pannekoek considered Sorel's writings to be 'bourgeois-confused', typical of a slow economic development.<sup>59</sup> By contrast, in 1912 he considered the principles of the IWW as 'perfectly correct'.<sup>60</sup> This strange distinction between syndicalism in France and that of America and the Netherlands is explained by the fact that the Dutch left considered the NAS and the IWW as the social expression of a modern proletariat, freed from artisan-strata, less qualified but more concentrated. But the Dutch left in no way altered its political rejection of the federalist and anti-centralist tendencies that developed in the new revolutionary syndicalism, in reaction against the revisionist unions.<sup>61</sup>

The debate on the mass-strike, conducted against Kautsky and the bureaucratic apparatus of the parties and unions from 1910 onwards, relegated these attempts at sociological explanations of revisionism and anarchism to the background. The most dangerous enemy of the revolution was no longer anarchism, but Kautskyist 'centrism', whose logical conclusion was the consolidation and even the triumph of revisionism. What was at stake was no longer the theoretical struggle against revisionism, but the struggle for the revolution. The proletariat's strategy had to be re-evaluated. With or against the unions, parliamentary or extra-parliamentary struggle. The aim of the class-struggle and its tactical methods – mass-struggle or union- and parliamentary struggle – had to be re-evaluated in the light of the wave of mass-strikes culminating in the first Russian revolution of 1905.

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59 Pannekoek on Georges Sorel's book *La Décomposition du Marxisme*, in *Die Neue Zeit*, 1908–9, Vol. 1, p. 555. In English, see *Reflections on Violence*, a book that influenced Mussolini.

60 Pannekoek in *Die Neue Zeit*, 1912, p. 903.

61 For example, the German revolutionary syndicalists seceded from the Social-Democrat 'Free Unions' (*Freie Gewerkschaften*) in 1907, to form localist organisations. In his article 'Der deutsche Syndikalismus' (*Bremer Bürgerzeitung*, 29 November 1913), Pannekoek insisted that 'revolutionary activity must be associated with the mass-strength of a centralised organisation', not dispersed in localist organisations.

### 3 From the Mass-Strike to the Proletarian Revolution

#### 3.1 *The Debate on the Mass-Strike in the Second International before 1905*

Until the turn of the century, before the outbreak of the 1905 Revolution in Russia, the debates within the Second International over the proletariat's means of revolutionary action were limited, constrained within the strait-jacket of its congress-resolutions on the general strike. The general strike advocated by the anarchist currents was rejected as foreign to the tactics and strategy of the workers' movement. Defended as an anti-political 'method' for 'making the revolution' without the formation of workers' political organisations, it became the prerogative of revolutionary syndicalism.<sup>62</sup> Revolutionary syndicalism rejected any parliamentary tactics, or any strategy of long-term organisation of the workers' movement; it theorised 'active minorities' and 'revolutionary gymnastics' as necessary and sufficient means to maintain, by 'direct action', the working masses' spirit of revolt. For Sorel and his followers, the general strike was both an abrupt crisis ('The Great Day'), overthrowing capitalism in one decisive action, and an idealist myth which could give the masses a quasi-religious faith in the success of the revolution. From the outset, the debate on the general strike was a struggle between two opposing conceptions: anarchism or revolutionary syndicalism, and Marxism. At stake was the proletariat's organised political activity to prepare the subjective conditions for revolution. Only after a wave of generalised and mass-strikes starting at the beginning of the century could the debate on the 'general strike' cease to be a theoretical fight between Marxism and anarchism, to become the crucial debate within the Marxist camp regarding the advance of the revolution, the dividing line between Marxists and revisionists or reformists.

From the very outset of the workers' movement, the general strike as a political means of struggle against the capitalist system had been at the heart of its concrete concerns. It was used for the first time in 1842 by the Chartist movement in Britain. At the end of a long economic depression which had lowered workers' wages, and in the context of a Chartist petition for universal suffrage, a movement of spontaneous strikes, spreading from England to Scotland and Wales, had generalised over three weeks, affecting 3 million workers. Without organisation, without leadership, but also without clear political perspectives, the strike failed. Characteristically, this 'general' strike, which was more a generalised strike, was both political and economic. It was spontaneous, mass, and without any previous organisation.

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62 See Dubief 1969.

During the era of the First International, the 1868 International Congress in Brussels advocated the idea as a political means of preventing future wars. But this congress-decision remained without any practical effect.

In the Second International, the question of the 'general strike' was posed in two ways: as a demonstration for the proletariat's political and economic rights, and as a means of anti-militarist struggle against the danger of war. In 1892, the general strike was used for the first time as a political means to conquer universal suffrage; a second general strike called by the Belgian Workers' Party (POB) won a tiered plural voting system for male electors. From then on, the question of the general strike was posed practically at every congress of the Second International.

The congresses in Brussels (1891), Zürich (1893), and London (1896) marked a definitive break with anarchism. The latter current, which advocated the 'universal general strike' as a panacea against war or for revolution, was expelled, and its theses on the general strike rejected. The International's position was first to encourage partial strikes, as a means for carrying out the proletariat's economic and political tasks, and to accelerate the proletariat's organisation as a preliminary to an international movement. In a period characterised by the struggle for reforms, and for the proletariat's organisation as a conscious class, conditions were not present for international revolutionary mass-action. This remained the position of the Marxist left until the moment when the first symptoms of a new historic period appeared in the full light of day. The conditions of the period prior to 1905, when the division between revolutionaries and reformists was still unclear, allowed the revisionists to avoid an in-depth debate on the proletariat's methods of action: partial strikes, the general strike, the mass-strike. At the Paris Congress in 1900, the revisionist leader of the German unions, Carl Legien, could declare without challenge: 'as long as there are no strong organisations, there can be no question for us of any discussion of the general strike'.<sup>63</sup>

From 1901 onwards, the problem posed in the real class-struggle, on both the economic and the political terrain, was no longer the abstract one of an international general strike, but the concrete problem of workers' mass-strikes. In 1901, a rail-strike broke out in Barcelona; unlike other trade conflicts, led by the unions, this strike spread to the engineering workers. 1902 saw strikes used as demonstrations for equal universal suffrage in Sweden and Belgium. In 1903, mass-strikes spread throughout Russia, shortly after the generalised strikes on the Dutch railways. But it was above all the Italian mass-strikes of 1904 that put

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63 Quoted by Grüenberg 1970.

discussion of the general strike and the mass-strike back on the agenda. In the autumn of 1904, a series of workers' risings spread throughout the Mezzogiorno. The terrible repression that followed led the Milan trades-council to call a general strike. This spread to the whole of Italy, and for four days workers occupied the factories. For the first time in the history of the workers' movement, workers in several big northern industrial cities formed workers' councils.<sup>64</sup> Although 'order' was soon restored, this spontaneous workers' movement, begun without any instructions from either the unions or the Socialist Party, prefigured in its organisation and generalisation, the 1905 Revolution in Russia. The question of the 'general strike' and the 'mass-strike' could henceforth only be understood in its full international dimension.

Faced with the huge wave of international class-struggle, the Dutch SDAP was given the task of presenting a report on the general strike to the International Congress of 1904, in Amsterdam. The first reason for this was the experience of the Dutch workers' movement in two mass-strikes in the one year of 1903. But above all, two tendencies had crystallised within the SDAP, which were also to be found in the other parties of the International. The revisionist tendency, expressed by Vliegen and Van Kol, and supported by Troelstra, rejected the general strike as a means of political struggle: they saw it as an 'act of despair' by the proletariat, whose effect would be to isolate it from the middle classes, and proposed to stick solely to parliamentary action. The Marxist tendency, grouped around the periodical *De Nieuwe Tijd* (Van der Goes, Gorter, Roland Holst, Pannekoek) presented a report for the 1904 Dordrecht Congress which was extremely important in clarifying the concept of the 'general strike'. It proposed to replace this notion with that of the 'political strike': 'The term general strike is incorrect. That of a political strike expresses our meaning better.'<sup>65</sup> This congress produced a compromise resolution drawn up by Roland Holst, which was to be used as a basis for the International Congress in Amsterdam.

The resolution for the International Congress, presented by Roland Holst, was a step forward in that it proclaimed the 'possibility' of general strikes breaking out as 'the best means for implementing social changes of great importance, or of defence against reactionary attacks on workers' rights'. Classically, the resolution called on workers to reinforce their 'class-organisations', as a precondition for the success of the political strike, and warned against the anarchists' use of the general strike in an anti-political sense. But Roland Holst made a

64 For the revolutionary events in Italy, 1904, see Paris 1962, p. 45.

65 Vliegen 1924, Part 2, pp. 39–40.



concession to the revisionists by declaring – in advance – the 'impossibility' of a 'complete work-stoppage' at any given moment, because 'such a strike would make all existence – that of the proletariat as of others – impossible'.<sup>66</sup> Only a few months later, the general strike in Italy confounded this prediction.

In fact, Henriëtte Roland Holst's presentation posed the problems raised by the 'general strike' much more clearly. She used the term 'mass-strike', showing that it had no 'economic aim' as such, but was used defensively 'against the capitalist state'. A sign of the confusion existing at the time, however, lay in her simultaneous use of the term 'general strike', as she declared that this 'could not be the social revolution'.

Scarcely months after the congress's closure, the revolution in Russia swept away in practice all the old formulations and predictions. The mass-strike movements in Russia, distinct from the general strike, showed that a massive proletarian struggle stood as much on the economic as on the political terrain. It was both defensive and offensive; the workers' general organisation was not a precondition, but a consequence of the deepening of the movement; directed 'against the capitalist state', it was necessarily a moment of the 'social revolution'.

Simultaneously, in January 1905, the Ruhr miners spontaneously went on strike *en masse*, acting beyond all instructions from the unions. The union-leadership prevented the strike from spreading. In May 1905, at the Cologne union-congress, the union-leader Bömelburg took a position against any mass-strike, and declared: 'to build our organisations, we need calm in the workers' movement'.<sup>67</sup> Thus, in the country with the best-organised proletariat in the world, not only did the workers' effective action come up against the barrier of the very organisations they had so patiently built, but they had to conduct the struggle outside, and in opposition to them, without needing any already-existing or permanent organisation to lead it. For the whole workers' movement, the year 1905 posed the problem not just of the form (generalisation, self-organisation, spontaneity), but of the content of the mass-strike: reforms or revolution.

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66 For Henriëtte Roland Holst's resolution and the discussion on the mass-strike at the Amsterdam Congress of 1904, see Haupt and Winock (eds.) 1979–85, Vol. 14, pp. 320–22.

67 Quoted by Schorske 1981, p. 64. Most of the references to the German workers' movement are drawn from this book, first published in English in 1955.

### 3.2 *The Dutch-German Left and the Mass-Strike. Henriëtte Roland Holst and Rosa Luxemburg*

The Marxist left had begun to analyse the mass-strike well before 1905. Begun by Rosa Luxemburg, this analysis was continued by Roland Holst in the Dutch left during 1905, then taken up again in greater depth by Luxemburg and finally Pannekoek. While the positions of the Marxist left in Germany and the Netherlands appear the most coherent, they cannot be considered independently of those of the Russian left, and of Trotsky in particular. There was an evident solidarity and theoretical convergence between them, in the fight against reformism and for the revolution.

The first person to use the term 'political mass-strike' was, in fact, a Russian. In 1895, Parvus<sup>68</sup> advocated political mass-action as a method of proletarian defence against the state, and one which could initiate the social revolution. Put forwards in reaction to the revisionism in the practice of the German party, the 'political mass-strike' was rejected by both the SPD leadership and by the left, represented at that time by Kautsky and Mehring. But in 1902, during the general strike called by the Belgian party and conducted within strictly legal boundaries, only to be called off, Rosa Luxemburg considered all its possible uses for the proletariat. Defending the 'political general strike' as an 'extra-parliamentary action' which should not be sacrificed to parliamentary action, she showed that such action would be without effect if it were not backed up by 'the menacing spectre of the free flowering of the popular movement, the spectre of revolution'.<sup>69</sup> While condemning the anarchist slogan of the 'general strike' as a 'universal panacea', she pointed out that this was 'one of the oldest slogans in the modern workers' movement'. The general strike corresponded in fact to an 'accidental political strike', which could be neither called nor controlled to order. Like the revolutions of the past, it should be understood as one of the 'elementary social phenomena produced by a natural force whose well-spring lies in the class-nature of modern society'. As such, she posed the question of the necessary use of class-violence as an 'irreplaceable offensive method', 'both in the various episodes of the class-struggle, and for the final conquest of state-power'. Prophetically, she concluded that if the Social Democracy 'really decided to renounce violence once and for all, if it decided to commit the working masses to abide by bourgeois legality, then all its political struggle, parliamentary or not, would sooner or later collapse pitifully, to give way to the unlimited domination of reactionary violence.'

68 Grünenberg 1970, contains a text by Parvus on the subject.

69 This and the quotes that follow on the experience of the Belgian strike are taken from a collection of texts in French, Mehring and Luxemburg 1969, pp. 17–41.

The 1905 Revolution in Russia, which began with a general strike and ended in the defeat of the December insurrection, allowed the Marxist left in Germany and the Netherlands to clarify the revolutionary conception against either the rejection, or at best the tepid acknowledgement, of the mass-strike within the Social Democracy. Rejected by the revisionists, the SPD's Jena Congress in September 1905 paid lip-service to the notion of the mass-strike. Bebel's resolution, which was nonetheless hailed as a 'victory' for the left, commended the mass-strike solely as a 'defensive weapon', and considered that the events in Russia could not serve as example for the workers' movement in the West.<sup>70</sup> A few months later, in February 1906, a secret conference of the SPD and the unions was held in order to prevent the spread of the mass-strike among the German proletariat.

Faced with this attitude, which had already emerged by 1905, Kautsky, then still on the left of the SPD, asked Roland Holst to draw up a pamphlet on 'The General Strike and the Social Democracy', published in June 1905 with a preface by himself.<sup>71</sup> This pamphlet came to political conclusions on the revolutionary mass-strike in Russia which were to be taken up by the whole left:

- there is 'no rigid frontier' between the partial and the general strike;<sup>72</sup>
- 'the political strike is the union of political and economic struggles, the mobilisation of the proletariat's economic power in order to achieve its political goals';<sup>73</sup>
- mass-action is 'the form that corresponds to any revolution where the conscious industrial proletariat constitutes the greatest mass-force';<sup>74</sup>
- 'the political mass-strike becomes the form for the decisive struggle for political power, to take over the state';
- '... in the struggle for state-power, violence could be a factor in securing victory'.<sup>75</sup>

Finally, Roland Holst clarified the subjective and objective conditions for such a mass-strike: the proletariat's organisation and self-education, discipline and class-consciousness – all qualities which are rooted in the proletariat's concentration in large enterprises. All these qualities necessary to the revolu-

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<sup>70</sup> Schorske, 1981, p. 69.

<sup>71</sup> Roland Holst 1906.

<sup>72</sup> Roland Holst 1906, p. 6.

<sup>73</sup> Roland Holst 1906, p. 120.

<sup>74</sup> Roland Holst 1906, p. 84.

<sup>75</sup> Roland Holst 1906, p. 180.

tion's success were always emphasised by the Dutch left, and by Pannekoek in particular (see below).

But Roland Holst distanced herself from the Marxist left's vision, demonstrating a centrist viewpoint close to Kautsky's, in still not seeing 'any contradiction between parliamentarism and the political mass-strike',<sup>76</sup> while paradoxically pointing out the 'decline of bourgeois parliamentarism'. She saw, above all – in contradiction with her own analyses – the danger that the mass-strike might turn into an insurrection: 'There is a danger that the masses fail to recognise the strike's political goals, whether demonstration or to apply pressure, and consider it as the final struggle, orientated towards the annihilation of capitalism'.<sup>77</sup>

The whole question was this: whether the revolutionary mass-strike in Russia had opened up a new revolutionary historical period, and whether its lessons were universally valid, including for the 'organised' workers' movement in the West, whose struggles had always been defined by the Social Democracy as 'defensive'.

Rosa Luxemburg's pamphlet *The Mass Strike, The Political Party, and the Trade Unions*, published in 1906 but censored<sup>78</sup> was part of the struggle against the reformist conceptions of the SPD leadership and the unions. Its conclusions were the same as Roland Holst's. But Rosa Luxemburg's theoretical framework was far broader. Fired with revolutionary passion, more critical than Roland Holst of the SPD and union bureaucracies, far more incisive vis-à-vis parliamentary activity, this pamphlet can be considered as the first revolutionary manifesto of the Dutch-German left-current. The most important points were as follows:

- there is no such thing as a 'Western road' to socialism, through parliamentary strategy and the peaceful evolution of the workers' movement; the lessons of the Russian revolution are universal, valid in all countries, including the most developed: 'The mass-strike thus appears not as a specifically Russian product of absolutism, but as a universal form of proletarian class-struggle determined by the present stage of capitalist development and the balance

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<sup>76</sup> Roland Holst 1906, p. 127.

<sup>77</sup> Roland Holst 1909, p. 120.

<sup>78</sup> See Nettl 1966. Luxemburg's book was to appear first as a printed manuscript for internal distribution to the delegates to the SPD congress. Under pressure from the unions, all the surviving copies of the first edition were shredded, and another more 'moderate' edition was published, where a number of formulations considered 'provocative' by the unions were excised.

of class-forces ... The most backward country ... has shown the proletariat of Germany and the most advanced capitalist countries the path and the methods of the struggle to come';<sup>79</sup>

- the mass-strike is neither an accidental phenomenon – the term used by Luxemburg in 1902 – nor a single action, like the general strike, 'but describes a whole period of class-struggle extending over several years, sometimes decades';
- the historical period of mass-strikes marks the upsurge of a revolutionary epoch: 'The mass-strike is simply the form taken by the revolutionary struggle ... It is the living pulse of the revolution, and at the same time its most powerful motor'. And Luxemburg declared unambiguously that the revolutionary process is present right from the outset of any mass-strike: 'in reality, it is not the mass-strike that produces the revolution, but the revolution that produces the mass-strike';
- the mass-strike, as a living phenomenon, cannot be dissected, any more than it can be broken down into rigid categories, so as to draw up a table of schematic classifications. It embraces every form of class-struggle, both economic and political, that make up a global and unitary struggle of the proletariat, whose categories and divisions disappear to make way for the whole, the class: economic strikes and political strikes, mass-strikes and partial strikes, demonstrations or combat-strikes, general strikes covering particular branches of industry of whole towns, peaceful economic struggles or street-fighting and barricades. All these forms of struggle live alongside or within each other, flowing the one into the other: it is 'an ocean of eternally new and fluctuating phenomena'. 'There are not two distinct forms of working-class struggle, one political and the other economic: there is only one class-struggle which aims both to limit the effects of exploitation and to put an end to this exploitation and to bourgeois society at the same time';
- class-consciousness is formed, forged and developed, not just in the crucible of already-existing organisations (parties and unions), through a long 'education'-process, but also, and above all, in the revolution, where it becomes 'concrete and active': the revolution accelerates the proletariat's coming-to-consciousness, and quickly gives it the best 'education', that of the struggle, which requires 'a great idealism';
- it is a mistake to think that (party- and union-) organisation can bureaucratically and mechanically engender the class-struggle. On the contrary,

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79 Quotations taken from Luxemburg 1968, pp. 135–228.

the struggle gives birth to the general organisation of the proletariat: 'Dialectical, living evolution ... gives birth to organisation as a product of the struggle'. While the organisation of the proletariat as a whole was born with the struggle, there was no question of a 'spontaneist' rejection of political organisation. This remained the 'most enlightened and conscious vanguard of the proletariat'. But its role and function changed; they were no longer to 'educate' the proletariat, or to organise or direct the struggle practically, but to orientate it politically: 'the task of the Social Democracy consists, not in the preparation or practical leadership of the strike, but in the political leadership of the movement as a whole'.

There is no doubt that this pamphlet served as a political and theoretical foundation for the left-Marxist current in Germany and the Netherlands, and for left-communism from 1919 onwards. The most obvious missing point, which was not mentioned explicitly by either Roland Holst, Luxemburg or Pannekoek, was the Petrograd workers' soviet, which played an enormous part in the first Russian revolution; the role and function of the workers' councils were never analysed and recognised. In the framework of the struggle against revisionism and reformism, Luxemburg only cited the example of the creation of Russian unions in 1905, in order to contrast these with the reformist German unions. Trotsky was alone – and without this having any echo in the German-Dutch left prior to 1914 – in showing the fundamental role of the workers' councils as the 'organisation of the proletariat itself' whose aim was the struggle 'for the conquest of revolutionary power'.<sup>80</sup> Moreover, the question of the capitalist state and its destruction by the revolution was scarcely mentioned by Roland Holst, and not dealt with at all by Luxemburg. When the discussion started up again from 1909 onwards, this time between Kautsky and the Marxist left, it was Pannekoek who posed the question clearly for the first time.

### 3.3 *The Struggle against Kautskyist Centrism*

The revolutionary mass-strike in Russia had a considerable echo in the West, despite the assertions of the reformists. In 1905 in Germany, half a million workers struck: more in one year than in the whole decade 1890–1900, and more than in any other year between 1848 and 1917.<sup>81</sup> The SPD's 1907 electoral defeat, after the nationalist wave of the so-called 'Hottentot elections' (named after a

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80 See Trotsky 1905, Chapter 'Conclusions', pp. 222–41.

81 See Schorske 1981, pp. 53–4.

tribe in South-West Africa, coveted by German imperialism), along with the weakness of the class-struggle from 1907 to 1909, allowed the reformists to gain strength and to publicly show their face in Germany. This phenomenon of strengthening reformist and revisionist currents was, moreover, an international one. The left in Netherlands had the bitter experience of this. In Russia, a 'liquidationist' current developed in the RSDLP, in favour of legalistic activity and joint action together with the liberals. The International Congress in Stuttgart (1907) showed a clear evolution of the Social-Democratic parties towards the right, on all the questions of principle, despite a very radical amendment put forwards by Lenin, Luxemburg and Martov for the transformation of an eventual war into revolution.

From 1910 onwards, the debate on the mass-strike and the revolution, which the SPD leadership thought it had buried, re-emerged. Firstly, strike-movements resumed *en masse*, under the pressure of rising unemployment and falling wages. Secondly, as the threat of world-war became ever clearer, the question of using the mass-strike as a means of mobilising the proletariat against this threat was posed in deadly earnest. Finally, the Social-Democratic leaderships refused to use the 'weapon' of the mass-strike, urging instead a policy of demonstrations and general strikes for electoral reform and universal suffrage. This policy of demobilising the class-struggle by displacing it onto the parliamentary terrain was being put into practice by 1909 in Germany, by 1911 in the Netherlands (the 'Red Tuesdays')<sup>82</sup> and by 1913 in Belgium.

It was at this point that there occurred an ideological split within the orthodox-Marxist current in Germany. Kautsky took up the reformist positions of the Bebel leadership, and moved closer to Bernstein, who defended a 'centrist' position on the mass-strike, seeing it as a 'defensive weapon' in the struggle. This in fact was the seed of the future Independent tendency – which was to form the USPD in 1917 – opposed to the 'radical-left' current symbolised by Rosa Luxemburg and Pannekoek.

The debate on the mass-strike was reopened in 1910 by Rosa Luxemburg, in an article<sup>83</sup> which was refused for publication both by *Vorwärts* and by Kautsky's *Die Neue Zeit*; Kautsky thought that the question was already 'settled',

82 From 1910 onwards, the SDAP decided to establish a ritual, at the beginning of each year's parliamentary session (the third Tuesday of September) of meetings, demonstrations, and petitions to the government, calling for universal suffrage (these were known as 'Red Tuesdays'). For the SDAP, these annual demonstrations were a vastly preferable substitute for the mass-strike, which it never called for.

83 Luxemburg 1974.

and that any public polemic would only 'reveal our own weak spots to the enemy'.<sup>84</sup> In fact, Kautsky was using precisely the same arguments that the revisionists had used five years earlier against the left.

Kautsky aimed to show that the mass-strike in Russia was, in fact, a specificity of this economically 'backward' country. The action of the Russian workers was the expression of their 'desperate conditions', which were vastly different from those of the Western proletariat. He even claimed – flying in the face of historical reality – that 'such strikes used as demonstrations have never yet occurred in Western Europe'.<sup>85</sup> The notion of a revolutionary mass-strike was 'absolutely incompatible with conditions in an industrial country', enjoying 'political rights' and better living-conditions. The economic crisis, whose importance was emphasised by the 'radicals' in encouraging the upsurge of spontaneous class movements in the West, discouraged revolution and mass-strikes; the proletariat's sole weapon at this point was street-demonstrations for economic demands. The mass-strike in the West would better serve to rouse the workers' enthusiasm in a period of economic prosperity:

... in a period of crisis the proletariat shows less combativity, and in a period of prosperity less revolutionary élan ... In a period of crisis, it is easier to hold great street-demonstrations than mass-strikes. The proletariat's enthusiasm for the mass-strike is more easily aroused in times of prosperity than in times of crisis.<sup>86</sup>

Kautsky was prepared to concede that there might be 'local demonstration-strikes', but never generalised strikes. At the most, a mass-strike in the West would be purely defensive, and used as a 'means of coercion' against the government. The only possible strategy was a 'strategy of attrition' against the established authorities, of 'eating away' at the positions of the bourgeoisie, and not a 'strategy of annihilation' of capitalism. To support his arguments, Kautsky referred not to the period of mass-strikes before and after 1905, but to the history of ... Hannibal and his struggle against Rome. Pushed into a corner by Rosa Luxemburg and Pannekoek, Kautsky repeated the same arguments that he had once denounced when they came from the mouths of his old revisionist adversaries:

84 Kautsky, 'Was nun?', *Die Neue Zeit*, reproduced in French in Grünenberg 1983, p. 52.

85 Kautsky, 'Eine neue Strategie', in Grünenberg 1983, p. 152.

86 Kautsky, 'Was nun?', Grünenberg 1983, p. 78.



- parliamentary tactics are preferable to mass-revolutionary action, and even to political strikes: 'a political victory produces a much stronger impression';<sup>87</sup>
- using the 'crowd-psychology' of the reactionary Le Bon, Kautsky declared that 'The actions of the mass can just as well be reactionary, or even simply absurd';
- finally, the use of unorganised mass-action, outside the control of the trades-unions and the Social Democracy, threatened the existence of the workers' and revolutionary movement: 'The unpredictable nature of unorganised mass-actions has often been fatal to opposition-movements and parties, especially revolutionary ones'.<sup>88</sup>

In answering Kautsky, Rosa Luxemburg repeated the arguments she had put forwards earlier in *The Mass Strike, the Political Party and the Trade Unions*, but strengthened them. She showed the need for the proletariat to 'go resolutely on the offensive', a decision which could only come from the masses themselves. Kautsky's arguments were really only designed to 'hold back' the movements,<sup>89</sup> said Luxemburg in an article which was a whole programme in itself: 'Attrition or Combat?'

She got to the bottom of the question in the article 'Theory and Practice',<sup>90</sup> emphasising three fundamental points in the debate on the mass-strike:

- Russia's gigantic proletarian concentrations in Moscow and Petrograd pre-figured the revolution in Europe. Far from being backward, Russia demonstrated an 'advanced level of capitalist development';
- the mass-strike neither disorganised nor weakened the workers' movement. On the contrary, it paid off: the Russian mass-strike had made possible 'more victories on the economic, social, and political level than the German union-movement has achieved throughout its four decades of existence';
- a vigorous strike-movement was starting again in the West; the danger threatening it was the Social Democracy's ability to 'paralyse the finest mass-action by adopting an inconstant and feeble tactic'. Luxemburg concluded

87 Kautsky, 'Eine neue Strategie', in Grünberg 1983, p. 153.

88 Gustave Le Bon's sociology of crowds 'indoctrinated by their leaders' inspired Kautsky's article 'Massenaktion', in Grünberg 1983 pp. 271, and 275.

89 Luxemburg, 'Ermattung oder Kampf?', *Die Neue Zeit*, 1910, in Grünberg 1983, p. 216.

90 Luxemburg, 'Die Theorie und die Praxis', *Die Neue Zeit*, 1910, pp. 564–78 and 626–42, in Grünberg 1983, pp. 177–227.

optimistically that it was not a matter of leading a fight against the party-leadership and the unions; the masses would themselves take care of 'pushing aside its leaders who go against the current of the tumultuous movement'.

In fact, in the debate Rosa Luxemburg all too often remained on the terrain chosen by Kautsky and the SPD leadership. She called for a mass-strike to inaugurate a campaign of demonstrations and strikes in favour of universal suffrage, proposing as a 'transitory', mobilising slogan the struggle 'for the Republic'. On this terrain, it was easy enough for Kautsky to reply that 'it is absurd to try to inaugurate an electoral struggle with a mass-strike'. Moreover, Kautsky declared, the content of Social Democracy's principles is not that of an 'abstract' socialism: 'Social Democracy continues to mean republicanism, by its very nature'.<sup>91</sup>

Pannekoek chose a quite different terrain. Supported by the Bremen left and the Dutch Tribunists, between 1910 and 1912 he launched into a fundamental debate against Kautsky. Since 1909, the Tribunists' relations with Kautsky had deteriorated considerably, partly because of the Tribunist split from the SDAP, but, above all, following the publication of Pannekoek's book *Tactical Disagreements in the Workers' Movement*. Quite apart from its general theoretical orientation against revisionism, this book was one of the first milestones in the Marxist left's break with parliamentarism and official unionism.

### 3.4 *The New Tactic of Mass-Action: Pannekoek vs. Kautsky and the Question of the State*

While emphasising that parliamentarism had played a positive role in the proletariat's history ('parliamentarism has ... metamorphosed the proletariat, created by capitalism's enormous development, into a conscious and organised class, ready for struggle'),<sup>92</sup> Pannekoek emphasised that it could never serve as an instrument of proletarian rule; it is more the 'normal form of bourgeois political domination'. And he warned against the electoralism (*Nur-Parlamentarismus*, or 'Nothing-but-parliamentarism') developing in the Social Democracy. In doing so, the position of Pannekoek and the Tribunists looked back to Marx and Engels's denunciation of 'parliamentary cretinism'. On this point, Rosa Luxemburg and the German left had an identical position.

91 Kautsky, 'Zwischen Baden und Luxemburg', *Die Neue Zeit*, 1910, pp. 652–67, in Grüenberg 1983, p. 236.

92 Pannekoek 1909a, quoted in Bricianer 1969, pp. 75 and 80.

On the union-question, the position defended by the Dutch was much more radical than Rosa Luxemburg's. While agreeing with her that the unions should be subordinated to the party and its revolutionary programme, and that political and union struggles should be merged 'into a united struggle against the ruling class', Pannekoek declared that it was impossible to conduct a revolutionary struggle within the unions. Structurally, the unions stood, not on the terrain of the class-struggle, but on that of the bourgeois state, and so could not be organs of a German communist left of revolutionary struggle: 'the unions do not situate themselves at all as capitalism's adversaries, but, on the contrary, stand on the same terrain as it ... The unions are not the direct organ of the revolutionary class-struggle; their aim is not the overthrow of capitalism. Quite the reverse, they are a necessary element for the stability of a normal capitalist society.' This – very contradictory – analysis heralded the rejection of the union-structure as an instrument of the struggle, and even of any 'revolutionary' union-structure. Kautsky presented this position as syndicalist,<sup>93</sup> but Pannekoek's left contained the seeds of the anti-trade-union principle adopted by the German communist left in the 1920s.

Pannekoek's critique of Kautsky, in its fully mature form in the 1912 texts 'Mass-Action and Revolution' and 'Marxist Theory and Revolutionary Tactics' was much deeper as a political and theoretical vision than that of Luxemburg, who remained essentially on the terrain chosen by Kautsky in this debate.<sup>94</sup>

First of all, Pannekoek demonstrated the convergence between Kautsky's old radicalism and revisionism; the 'passive radicalism' of the Kautskyist centre had a definite end point – the derailment of the revolutionary struggle onto the parliamentary and trade-union terrain: 'This passive radicalism converges with revisionism in the sense that it leads to the exhaustion of our conscious activity in the parliamentary and trade-union struggle'. From the theoretical viewpoint, Kautskyism was, far from a will to action, a fatalism that converged with the apocalyptic and catastrophist view of the revolution common to the anarchists in the form of the 'miracle' of a 'Great Day': '[passive radicalism] foresees revolutionary explosions as cataclysms appearing out of nowhere, as if from another planet, independently of our will and action, to give capitalism the *coup de grace*'.<sup>95</sup>

93 Kautsky, 'Der jüngste Radikalismus', *Die Neue Zeit*, 1912, pp. 436–46. Pannekoek answered defiantly, 'Well! Let's go for revolutionary syndicalism!' to close the debate with Kautsky (in 'Zum Schluss', *Die Neue Zeit*, 1912, pp. 611–12).

94 Grüenberg 1983, pp. 297–335 and 387–415.

95 Pannekoek, 'Mass-Action and Revolution', in Grüenberg 1983, pp. 322–3 and 298.

The main points of the revolutionary critique of Kautskyism, which the Dutch left consigned definitively to the revisionist camp, were as follows:

- in the era of imperialism and great capitalist coalitions, capitalism can no longer accord the proletariat lasting reforms, condemning the latter to defensive actions against the deterioration of its living-conditions. The mass-strike is the typical form of struggle in the imperialist era, and ceases to be a struggle for reforms: ‘... the class-struggle becomes more bitter, and tends to generalise; the struggle’s motive-force is no longer the hope of improving the class’s situation, but, increasingly, the sad necessity of confronting the deterioration in its living-conditions ... Mass-action is a natural consequence of modern capitalism’s development into imperialism; it is the form of struggle against capital which is more and more forced on the working class’;
- mass-action is sometimes seen as ‘correcting parliamentary action’, sometimes as an ‘extra-parliamentary political activity of the organised working class’.<sup>96</sup> Above all, it means spontaneous action, regrouping the active and conscious majority of workers, which implies both their own organisation and discipline. Without giving this organisation a name – the workers’ councils? – Pannekoek emphasised one major fact: the proletariat’s ability to organise itself, in mass-struggle outside parliament: ‘[The mass] was passive, it becomes an active mass, an organism with its own life, cemented and structured by itself, with its own consciousness and its own organs’;
- in mass-action, the role of the party is decisive; it is an active factor, catalysing the revolutionary action that it both leads and organises, ‘because it bears an important part of the masses’ capacity for action’. But this leading role is spiritual rather than material; the party’s role is not to command the proletariat like an army’s general staff: ‘[the party] is not the bearer of the entire will of the proletariat as a whole, and it cannot, therefore, give it an order to advance as if commanding soldiers’;<sup>97</sup>
- violent confrontation with the state, disposing of every means of repression, cannot stop the proletariat; the ruling class can destroy the form of proletarian organisation, but not its ‘spirit’, which persists in the working masses educated with a spirit of organisation, cohesion and discipline. Thus the state ‘can only destroy the proletarian organisation’s outside envelope, not

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96 Pannekoek, ‘Marxist Theory and Revolutionary Tactics’, in Grüenberg 1983, p. 407; ‘Mass Action and Revolution’, in Grüenberg 1983, p. 313.

97 Pannekoek, ‘Marxist Theory and Revolutionary Tactics’, in Grüenberg 1983, p. 414.

its essence'. This is fully verified in revolutionary action, where the organisation is tempered, and in the fire of experience becomes 'as solid as steel'.

- finally, returning to the question of the party, Pannekoek declared that the political party cannot be a mass-organisation, but must be a trained nucleus which cannot substitute itself for the will of the masses: 'But "we" are not the masses; we are only a little group, a nucleus. The course of events is determined by what the masses do, not by what we want'.<sup>98</sup> This conception was to be developed at length by the German-Dutch communist left during the 1920s.

But Pannekoek's essential contribution in the debate on the mass-strike lay less in his analysis of the role of the party, which he largely shared with Rosa Luxemburg, as in that of the finality of the revolution. If, as Pannekoek noted in 1912, each strike 'now appears as an explosion, a small-scale revolution',<sup>99</sup> this is because it is part of a long term process of confrontation with, and finally destruction of, the capitalist state: 'The [proletariat's] struggle only ends with the complete destruction of state organisation'.

This new conception of the relationship between the proletariat and the state was worlds apart from that of both the official Social Democracy and Kautsky. For the latter, there was no change in the tactics of the Social Democracy, notwithstanding the Russian Revolution. The goal was to take power, as constituted in the state, by means of a parliamentary majority, not to destroy the power of the state and its apparatus:

'... the aim of our political struggle remains the same as it was before: to seize state-power by conquering a majority in Parliament, and to ensure the Parliament's pre-eminence over the government. But the destruction of the state, never ... Never can this process lead to the destruction of the state-power, only to a shift in the relations of power within the state.'

For Kautsky, the 'conquest' of the state was thus a gradual, peaceful process, by parliamentary means and within the state-apparatus.

Seven years before Lenin came back to the question in his 1917 *State and Revolution* – which made extensive use of Pannekoek's arguments<sup>100</sup> – Pannekoek had posed the problem with startling clarity in his pamphlet *The means*

98 Pannekoek, 'Partei und Masse', *Bremer Bürgerzeitung*, 4 July 1914.

99 Pannekoek, 'Mass-Action and Revolution', in Grünenberg 1983; see also: Pannekoek 1909b, p. 30: 'Behind each temporary demand, the capitalists see lurking the hydra of revolution'.

100 See Chapter 6.3 of *State and Revolution*. At the time, the Russian Marxists had stayed aloof

*of proletarian power*:<sup>101</sup> 'The proletarian struggle is not only a struggle against the capitalist class for state-power, but a struggle against state-power'.<sup>102</sup> Although, as Lenin said, Pannekoek's presentation lacked 'clarity and precision', it contained the germ of the idea already developed by Marx and Engels, and constantly taken up again by the Marxist left after 1917, that the proletariat could not be satisfied with conquering the old state-power as such; it had to demolish the whole machinery (police, army, legal system, administration), to replace it with a new state-apparatus.

What type would this new state-power be? What would be the form of the dictatorship of the proletariat, built on the ruins of the power of the bourgeois state? Lacking any large-scale historical experience, Pannekoek and the Dutch left's answers to these questions remained vague. And yet their response was not – as Kautsky claimed<sup>103</sup> – an anarchist one: destruction of all state-power without the conquest of political power. In a pamphlet published in 1906 (*Uphheavals in the future state*), Pannekoek declared that the necessary conquest of political power by the proletariat was 'a long-term process, which can last for decades, with advances and setbacks'. As far as the period of transition between capitalism and communism was concerned, he insisted that the proletarian dictatorship should not be confused with nationalisation, nor with any kind of 'state-capitalism'.<sup>104</sup>

For Pannekoek, the period of transition was, in fact, determined by three conditions:

- the 'political domination of the working class' over society and the economy;
- unconditional 'workers' democracy';
- 'the improvement of the day-to-day situation of the popular working masses', through a 'powerful increase in labour-productivity' and 'the elevation of the

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from the polemic between Kautsky on the one hand, and Pannekoek and Luxemburg on the other. Trotsky wrote ironically about Luxemburg's 'noble impatience'. By contrast, Lenin in 1912 had already taken Pannekoek's side against Kautsky (see Malandrino 1987, pp. 140–41).

101 Pannekoek, 'Die Machtmittel des Proletariats, Vortrag gehalten vor Stuttgarter Arbeitern Oktober 1910', published in *Schwäbische Tagwacht*, 4 November 1910.

102 Ibid.

103 Kautsky, 'New Tactics' in Grüenberg 1983, p. 371: 'To date, the difference between Social Democrats and anarchists was that the former wanted to seize state-power while the latter wanted to abolish it. Pannekoek wants to do both.'

104 Pannekoek, *Ethik und Sozialismus. Umwälzungen im Zukunftsstaat*, Leipzig, 1906. Reprinted in Pannekoek 1974b. The quotes which follow are taken from this same pamphlet, *Neubestimmung des Marxismus*.

cultural level'. Socialism was not so much the 'violent suppression of private property' and an overthrow of juridical property relationships, as first and foremost 'the suppression of poverty and misery'.

The state existing during the transitional period, as envisaged before 1914 by the Dutch 'radicals', could perfectly well coexist with a Parliament and local councils. It would be, at one and the same time, a government, an administration and a parliament; but, above all, 'all sorts of committees for different purposes'. Although Pannekoek did not use the term, this state would be reduced to a 'semi-state', whose tasks would be essentially economic, and whose political domination would tend towards disappearance: 'The state will be a body with economic functions, which no longer has any need to exercise its own domination'.

The Dutch left went no further in its analysis of these complex problems. Of one thing it was certain: that socialism would mean the definitive departure from 'the animal epoch of humanity'.

#### 4 War or World-Revolution?

From 1910 onwards, the debates on the mass-strike were no longer situated solely on the terrain of the revolutionary perspective opened by the first Russian revolution. The development of imperialism and militarism posed the alternative of war or revolution. For the Dutch-German left, the mass-strikes in the West were already directly situated on the immediate terrain of the struggle against the war and against imperialism. The stakes of the debate were changing: no longer reform or revolution, but imperialism or socialism, nationalism or internationalism, war or world-revolution.

##### 4.1 *Crisis and Imperialism*

Pannekoek's theory of the mass-strike was closely tied to his conception of imperialism. However, for Pannekoek, it was not at all the case that imperialism appeared as the result of capitalism's decline at the end of its expansion. His conception was closer to that of Radek, which was taken up later by Lenin and Bukharin: imperialism was nothing other than the export of capital and the capitalist states' grip on the sources of raw materials. From this point of view, Pannekoek's conception was light-years away from Luxemburg's as set out in *The Accumulation of Capital*, which showed not only that imperialism was not only a tendency within capitalism imposed on all the developed countries, but led directly to its decline.

For Rosa Luxemburg, imperialism expressed not only capitalism's growing difficulty in finding new arenas for the accumulation of capital, and new solvent extra-capitalist markets, but, above all, the historic decline of a system whose collapse was inevitable. From the mortal crisis of a capitalist system in decline arose the objective possibility of a proletarian revolution.

Pannekoek was far from denying the role of the economic crisis as a factor in posing objectively the necessity of proletarian revolution. In 1913, when Luxemburg's book had just been published, Pannekoek clearly stated that the crisis was a determining factor in the revolutionary crisis: 'The crisis shakes things up, it leaves no room for feelings of calm and security; the changing conjuncture pushes the mind to reflect and revolutionises people's thinking. Crises thus contribute to a large extent to revolutionising the workers' movement, and to keeping it revolutionary.'<sup>105</sup>

Although he agreed with Luxemburg that the capitalist system had entered into a new period of crises, Pannekoek refused to follow her theoretical explanations on the nature of imperialism. Indeed, he was one of the most determined adversaries of Luxemburg's theory of the accumulation of capital. His condemnation of this theory was, in fact, partly due to a misunderstanding, but also to a difference in interpretation of the laws of capitalist accumulation. The misunderstanding lay in the concept of the 'historic necessity of imperialism'. According to Pannekoek, Luxemburg believed that capitalism's collapse, once it had reached its imperialist stage, was a 'mechanical necessity'. For him, imperialism could not be anything other than 'the particular form of expansion in this epoch', resulting in militarism and the exacerbation of social antagonisms. Imperialism was not necessary economically, but socially. It was fundamentally a question of power, of the social relationship between classes, not an economic necessity born of the saturation of the world-market. It was 'necessary' for as long as the proletariat was not strong enough to destroy the power of the bourgeoisie.<sup>106</sup>

The major disagreement between Pannekoek and Luxemburg lay not in imperialism's social and political consequences, but in the interpretation of the phenomenon of capitalist crisis. For Pannekoek, there was no economic problem of the market for capitalism to solve. The system could of itself find 'outlets for all its products'. There was no problem in absorbing commodities

<sup>105</sup> Pannekoek, 'Die Krisen und der Sozialismus', *Bremer Bürgerzeitung*, 26 July 1913.

<sup>106</sup> Pannekoek, 'Theoretisches zur Ursache der Krisen', *Die Neue Zeit*, Stuttgart, 1912–13, pp. 788–792; *Bremer Bürgerzeitung*, 29 January 1913. His critique of Luxemburg was further developed in *De Nieuwe Tijd* of May 1916, 'De economische noodzakelijkheid van het imperialisme', pp. 268–85.



in extra-capitalist markets (colonies, classes other than capitalists and proletarians): 'The purchasers are the capitalists and the workers themselves ... There is therefore no problem to solve'.<sup>107</sup> The origin of crises lay thus not in disturbances in the circulation of capital and commodities on a world-market that had become too restricted, but 'in the mechanism of production itself'. Pannekoek was to remain unswervingly faithful to this position all his life. For him, Marx's schemas in *Capital*, which took no account of capitalism's evolution and the saturation of the market, were enough. Pannekoek saw economic crises as nothing more than regular upheavals, which did not reveal any tendency towards the collapse of the system; their interest was solely political and social: their use as a condition for the liquidation of capitalism, provided that the proletariat kept intact its 'means of power': consciousness, organisation, unity.

Pannekoek's positions on imperialism in fact led him more-or-less clearly to a strategy of anti-imperialism. For him, capitalism's imperialist expansion led to political phenomena whose consequence was the heightening of the whole system's economic crisis. In 1912, he expressed a view which was close to Lenin's: 'The political revolution in Asia, the revolt in India, the rebellion of the Muslim world, are opposed to a further expansion of European capitalism, and constitute a decisive barrier to it.'

He thought that these movements would give 'the signal for the European proletariat's struggle for its own emancipation'.<sup>108</sup> This posed the problem of internationalism and the national question.

#### 4.2 *Nation or Class? The National Question*

Like all the Tribunists, Pannekoek in 1909 still thought that socialism should 'take a position for the right of peoples to self-determination, against all exploitation or oppression, and against absolutism'.<sup>109</sup> This was a classic position in the workers' movement. But if the left-Marxists had to take a position against all colonial and national exploitation and oppression, did this mean that they should look for 'national solutions' to it, and, therefore, support the national bourgeoisie in countries demanding independence or autonomy? Pannekoek himself was to profoundly alter the Tribunists' view on this point, in a rigorously anti-national and internationalist sense, from 1912 onwards.

This anti-national and internationalist conception was laid down with complete clarity by Marx and Engels in 1848, when they emphasised in the *Com-*

107 Pannekoek, in *Bremer Bürgerzeitung*, 26 January 1913.

108 Pannekoek, 'Weltrevolution', in *Bremer Bürgerzeitung*, 30 December 1911.

109 Pannekoek, on an article by Otto Bauer, in *Die Neue Zeit*, 1911–12, pp. 542–4.

*munist Manifesto* that 'The workers have no country'. The category of class predominated over the category of nation, which with the disappearance of 'national demarcations and antagonisms between peoples' was historically transitory and fated to disappear. However, in a period when the capitalist mode of production was in the ascendant, as it gradually extended its domination throughout the world-market, and produced new capitalist nations, Marxism's founders left room for national demands, to the point of theorising 'historic nations' which could further develop capitalism and so hasten its eventual disappearance. The policy of the founders of scientific socialism was far from coherent. They rejected the idea of a Czech nation, and in 1882 Engels argued that in Europe there were only two nations – Poland and Ireland – which had 'not merely the right, but the duty of being national before being international'. Yet in a 20 June 1893 letter to Paul Lafargue, the same Engels wrote that 'unless autonomy and unity are granted to each nation, then neither the international union of the proletariat, nor the peaceful and intelligent cooperation between nations for common ends will be possible.'<sup>110</sup> This latter position, which somewhat contradicted that of 1848, was to become the position of the Second International.

It fell to Rosa Luxemburg to call into question this final schema of 1896, over the Polish question. She felt it necessary to 're-evaluate Marx's old ideas on the national question'. Rejecting Polish independence as contrary to proletarian aims, she still agreed with the 'national liberation' of the Christian peoples ruled by the Turkish Empire. However, in her 1908 text 'The national question and autonomy', she definitively rejected any reconciliation between 'national liberation' and the proletarian class-struggle.

The concept of the 'nation' had to be rejected, as a bearer of bourgeois ideology and as destructive of class-consciousness: '... a concept such as "the nation" is, in fact, one of those categories of bourgeois ideology that Marxist theory has subjected to radical review, showing that behind the mysterious veil of concepts like "bourgeois liberty", "equality before the law", and so on, there is always hidden a precise historical content. In class-society, a "nation", as a homogeneous socio-political entity, does not exist; by contrast, in each nation there are classes with antagonistic interests and "rights"'.<sup>111</sup>

Rosa Luxemburg's theoretical and political position was a world away from those defended by the International's principal 'tenors', who allowed a patriotic and nationalist ideology to develop within the ranks of the workers' movement.

<sup>110</sup> Pannekoek 1909a, quoted in Bricianer 1969, p. 93.

<sup>111</sup> See the introduction by Georges Haupt to Haupt, Löwy and Weill 1974.

Jaurès, for example, declared that socialism would be 'the universal fatherland of independent and friendly nations'. Kautsky, already a 'centrist', wrote in 1909 that 'We are not anti-national, any more than we are hostile or indifferent to the individual'. And he reproached Bauer, the specialist on the national question in the Austro-Hungarian party, for failing to carry out a 'fundamental synthesis between nationalism and internationalism'.<sup>112,113</sup>

In 1912, Pannekoek intervened on the national question with a pamphlet titled *Class-struggle and nation*, published in Reichenberg (Liberec), an industrial town in Bohemia. It argued in the same sense as Josef Strasser, a member of the Austrian ultra-left. *The Worker and the Nation*, which Strasser also published there at the same time, complemented Pannekoek's pamphlet, and, at times, took its arguments further and in a more radical direction.<sup>114</sup> Their intervention was an overall attack on the positions of the Austromarxist Otto Bauer, and thence against the penetration of Austro-Hungarian Social-Democratic Party by nationalist ideology. This party was a federation of six national parties; it was divided not into sections, but into nations. The most virulent nationalists within the *Gesamtpartei* (the 'Overall Party') were the Czech separatists, who in 1906 seceded with the Czech trades-unions. Simultaneously, a nationalist tendency developed within the Austrian party, which was in favour of a Greater-German imperialism.

There is no doubt that Otto Bauer's 1907 book *The question of nationalities and the Social Democracy* served as a theoretical cover for the nationalist tendencies within the Social Democracy.<sup>115</sup> Defining the 'nation' as a community of language, character and destiny, Bauer defended the idea of a specific 'national individuality'. His viewpoint was, in fact, close to that of Kautsky and other theoreticians of the International, when he maintained that the socialist project would be characterised not by the destruction of nations to form a worldwide human community, but by a federation of nations: 'international unity through national diversity'.<sup>116</sup>

112 Luxemburg, in Haupt, Löwy and Weill 1974, 'The national question and autonomy', pp. 184–203.

113 Kautsky, in Haupt, Löwy and Weill 1974, p. 147.

114 Strasser and Pannekoek 1977, with an introduction by Claudie Weill. Contains Strasser's 'On internationalism. The Worker and the Nation', and Pannekoek's 'Class-struggle and Nation'. Reprint in German of Strasser's pamphlet: Strasser 1982.

115 Extracts available in Haupt, Löwy and Weill 1974, pp. 233–72.

116 The Pannekoek quotations that follow are translated from the French version of the text already cited, 'Class-struggle and Nation'.

Paradoxically, in his pamphlet Pannekoek used Bauer's definition of the nation as 'a group of men tied by common destiny and character', adding to this language as 'the most important attribute of a nation, although nations are not identical with human groups sharing the same language'.

But the difference between Bauer's conception and that of Pannekoek – and Luxemburg – very quickly becomes apparent. Unlike Bauer, who saw the 'nation' as an eternal category, Pannekoek showed its transitory nature: '... the nation is only a temporary and transitory structure in the history of human development, one of many forms of organisation that succeed one another, or appear simultaneously: tribes, peoples, empires, churches, village-communities, states. Amongst them, the nation is essentially a product of bourgeois society, and will disappear with it'.<sup>117</sup>

This is why, once bourgeois nations were formed on the basis of the exploitation of the proletariat, the latter affirmed itself as their negation. 'The national community of character and destiny' between bourgeoisie and proletariat 'more and more disappears'; and – contrary to Bauer's ideas – with capitalism's accelerated development, relations between the two antagonistic classes 'are dominated more and more by their different destinies'. As for the 'proletarian nationalism' which existed at the time of bourgeois revolutions, this 'lost its roots' as soon as the exploited class confronted its 'own bourgeoisie, which took charge of its exploitation'.

Apart from the bourgeoisie, the only class that has national roots and manifests the most virulent nationalism, is the petty bourgeoisie. Pannekoek's argument, here, comes close to that of Strasser, who shows how 'language-workers' – in fact, civil servants, office-workers, and so on – have an interest in the maintenance of the national framework that guarantees their subsistence. But Pannekoek emphasised more than Strasser the parasitic nature of these petty-bourgeois strata, attached to national 'privileges' and functioning as a clientele: 'The nation as a bonded community is for those who are part of it, a clientele, a market, a domain for exploitation, where they have an advantage over their competitors from other nations'.<sup>118</sup> Their nationalism is that of cliques vying amongst themselves for 'influence over the state, or power in the state'.<sup>119</sup> This analysis was to be maintained by the communist left, whenever it pointed out the social forces involved in 'national-liberation struggles'.

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<sup>117</sup> Strasser and Pannekoek 1977, p. 166.

<sup>118</sup> Strasser and Pannekoek 1977, p. 137.

<sup>119</sup> Strasser and Pannekoek 1977, p. 148.

Finally, Otto Bauer's argument of a community of 'culture' used to defend the idea of a 'national identity' is a false one. The only valid culture for the proletariat of any given country is a socialist one, which has nothing national about it, and stands against the entire bourgeois world: 'What we call the cultural effects of the class-struggle, the workers' acquisition of self-consciousness, knowledge and the desire to learn, of elevated intellectual demands, have nothing in common with bourgeois national culture, but represent the growth of socialist culture. This culture is the product of a struggle which is a struggle against the entire bourgeois world.'<sup>120</sup>

It is the international class-struggle, developing in every country, that strikingly reveals the proletariat's international and internationalist nature. In the modern epoch, this international character of the proletariat grows constantly, as workers engaging in mass-strikes exchange and use each others' theory, tactics and methods of struggle. By definition, the proletariat is a single army, temporarily dispersed in national battalions to combat the same worldwide capitalist enemy: 'The proletariat of every country sees itself as a single army, as a great union which is only compelled by practical reasons – since the bourgeoisie is organised into states and, therefore, there are numerous fortresses to be taken – to split into separate battalions which must combat the enemy separately.'<sup>121</sup>

This is why, Pannekoek emphasised, Marxism's role is to make constant propaganda to strengthen the workers' class-consciousness, and their feeling of belonging to a single worldwide army. The strength of the national idea is directly proportional to the stifling of class-consciousness. The national idea 'is a barrier to the class-struggle, whose prejudicial power must, as far as is possible, be eliminated'. This is why Pannekoek followed Luxemburg in urging a clear rejection of national independence in Europe, and especially in Poland and Austria-Hungary. National confrontations, like religious antagonisms, are a means of diverting the class-struggle, 'an excellent means of dividing the proletariat, of turning its attention from the class-struggle by means of ideological slogans, and of preventing its class unity'.<sup>122</sup>

Left-Marxism's policy on the national question was thus not a utopia. It was not a call for an internationalist 'ethics', but a practical policy aimed against a real force: bourgeois-nationalist ideology, whose ultimate goal was the disintegration of the international workers' army, and, eventually, preparation

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120 Strasser and Pannekoek 1977, pp. 153–4.

121 Strasser and Pannekoek 1977, p. 160.

122 Strasser and Pannekoek 1977, p. 186.

for war. Pannekoek summed up the Dutch policy of active internationalism in the following terms, burning with 'class-feeling':

We will answer all the nationalist slogans and arguments: exploitation, surplus-value, bourgeoisie, class-domination, class-struggle. If they talk about demands for national education, we will draw attention to the poverty of the teaching allowed the workers' children, who are taught no more than what is necessary to later slave in the service of capital. If they talk about road-signs or administrative costs, we will talk about the poverty that forces proletarians to emigrate. If they talk about national unity, we will talk about exploitation and class-oppression. If they talk about the greatness of the nation, we will talk about the solidarity of the proletariat throughout the world.<sup>123</sup>

Pannekoek's pamphlet, written in a style that was both passionate and didactic, was one of the most ringing calls ever written in the Second International for the defence of internationalist class-sentiment against the disintegration of this sentiment by nationalist ideology, including within the ranks of the workers' movement.

The pamphlet agreed entirely with Strasser, despite occasionally taking a somewhat different line to the extent that he made concessions to Bauer. Pannekoek undoubtedly put forwards a classical view of the socialist future, declaring that the future economic unit would be the world, not the state or the nation. 'This material basis of the collectivity, organised world-production, will transform the humanity of the future into a single community of destiny'.<sup>124</sup>

Unlike Strasser, however, he envisaged the existence in this unified world of 'communities of language': these 'groups of the same language' would be the remnants of 'nations', whose mutual relationships would create a common language. This undoubtedly reintroduced the concept of the 'nation', effectively maintaining 'diversity' within the classless society, even though Pannekoek's argument had been to show that only the petty bourgeoisie had any interest in the preservation of a 'national language'. Strasser was more logical, in looking forwards enthusiastically to the appearance of a single world-language to cement the new world-community: 'Let us put an end to the multiplicity of languages, let us make one language the language of universal communica-

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<sup>123</sup> Strasser and Pannekoek 1977, p. 177.

<sup>124</sup> Strasser and Pannekoek 1977, p. 163.

tion, which will be taught in every school in the world; it will soon be the only language and, consequently, will fulfil the function of language as a means of communication and understanding.<sup>125</sup>

Pannekoek's second ambiguity lay in his 'tactical' proposal, in Austria-Hungary, to recommend the unity of the party and unions, whatever their nationality, at the international level; but locally, 'for propaganda and education purposes', national sub-organisation.<sup>126</sup> Designed to take account of 'linguistic particularities', this again boiled down to reintroducing the 'national' factor within the proletarian organisation. But ambiguities like this were barely noticeable within this extremely important work.

In fact, Pannekoek's *Class-struggle and nation* was a fighting text entirely directed against nationalist ideology, which was the ideological foundation of the preparation for the world-war. As Pannekoek noted in 1913, the choice was, more and more, between mass-action, internationalism, and revolution, or else nationalism and war.<sup>127</sup>

#### 4.3 *The Alternative: World-War or World-Revolution*

In a prophetic article, published on 30 December 1911,<sup>128</sup> Pannekoek set forth in writing the historic perspective which was to be developed during the war, and serve as the slogan for the foundation of the Communist International in 1919. In this article, titled 'World-Revolution' – a term never used in the Second International – the Dutch theoretician declared, before Luxemburg had, that capitalism had entered its decline and that henceforth the only way out was either world-war or world-revolution. The system was in crisis and could no longer find new outlets for expansion. The new perspective was world-war and world-revolution:

War and revolution accompany [capitalism's] growth, world-war and world-revolution mean its decline ... The non-capitalist world becomes ever smaller, and therefore the number of competitors becomes ever greater ... With the end of expansion, the source of all new prosperity, crisis and unemployment, poverty and desperation push the masses to rebellion ... To the demand for world-war, [the proletariat] answers with world-revolution.

125 Strasser and Pannekoek 1977, p. 70.

126 Strasser and Pannekoek 1977, p. 183.

127 Pannekoek, 'Nationalismus und Sozialismus', *Bremer Bürgerzeitung*, 27 September 1913.

128 Pannekoek, 'Weltrevolution', *Bremer Bürgerzeitung*, 30 December 1911.

Nonetheless, this article seemed to make the outbreak of world-war a precondition for world-revolution. From the conjuncture of crisis, colonial wars and 'national liberation', and European wars leading to world-war, would come 'the day of the social revolution'.<sup>129</sup> Apart from the ambiguities specific to the Dutch left on the 'anti-imperialist struggle' and the national question (see below), this article in fact hesitated between 'world-war or world-revolution' as an alternative, or a causal perspective of 'war and revolution' which seemed – deceptively<sup>130</sup> – to be the case in the First World-War.

Later on, the Dutch left's position on this question became much more nuanced and less fatalist. In his 1912 polemic against Kautsky, Pannekoek devoted a long passage to the question of the struggle against war. World-war was not a foregone conclusion. While Pannekoek – optimistically – still declared that, in a conscious socialist proletariat, the outbreak of war would inflame not nationalist feeling, but 'revolutionary determination', he nonetheless emphasised that the revolutionary position was anything but fatalist. The problem for the working class was not 'what will happen after the war?', but, on the contrary, 'how can we prevent the war from happening?'. Any 'maximalist' bet on the revolutionary outcome of the world-war could only express doubt or despair of the proletariat's revolutionary capacities: 'Only if we despair of the proletariat's capacity for autonomous action can we see in a war the indispensable precondition for revolution'.

In reality, the struggle against the war was inseparable from the struggle for revolution, and vice versa: 'The struggle when war is at stake ... becomes an episode in the process of the revolution, an essential part of the proletariat's struggle for the conquest of power'.<sup>131</sup>

On the ideological level, the condition for the outbreak of war was less the European proletariat's adherence to the bourgeoisie and its imperialist slogans, than an absence of active resistance: 'The present state-power needs not the devotion, but the passive lack of resistance of the majority of the population; the only thing that could counter its plans would be the active resistance of the masses'.<sup>132</sup> Once again, in this active resistance the 'spirit of the masses' counted for more than 'party-decrees'. And, contrary to Kautsky's ideas, it would be possible to prevent the outbreak of war by the mobilisation of the workers in mass-strikes.

129 Pannekoek, 'Weltrevolution', *Bremer Bürgerzeitung*, 30 December 1911.

130 It was, in fact, the Revolution of 1917 that put an end to the war, due to its international impact among the proletariat, especially in Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy.

131 Pannekoek, 'Mass-action and revolution', in Grünenberg 1983, p. 335.

132 Pannekoek, 'Für den Frieden', in *Bremer Bürgerzeitung*, 23 December 1912.



It is true that Pannekoek, like most revolutionaries of the day, had a tendency to underestimate the penetration of nationalist ideology into the workers' movement. Confident in forty years of 'socialist education', they could scarcely imagine the collapse of the International and its parties, including the oldest and most powerful of them, the German party. Confident in the revolutionary perspective in the era of imperialism and capitalist decline, they underestimated the slow penetration of nationalist ideology into the sections of the International. They were confident in the resolutions of the International's Stuttgart and Basle congresses, and barely made any explicit criticism of their leaders' nationalist declarations. Their critiques, put forwards with great clarity, were directed against the Kautskyist 'centre' and seemed to spare the 'proletarian leaders' like Bebel. And yet in 1907 Bebel used much the same language as Noske, who wanted 'Germany to be as well-armed as possible, and that the entire German people should take an interest in the military organisations which are necessary for the defence of our fatherland'.<sup>133</sup> At the 1907 Essen Congress, Bebel declared – and was warmly applauded for it by Kautsky in 1912, without Pannekoek picking this up – that the defence of the 'fatherland' was a duty of socialism: 'If one day we really have to defend the fatherland, then let us defend it, because it is our fatherland, the land we live on ... And this is why, if the need arises, we should defend the fatherland if we are attacked.'<sup>134</sup>

As the International tended slowly towards disintegration, at the time of the Basle Congress (November 1912), Pannekoek declared that 'the International had never been so strong and united', and that 'more and more the soldiers of all countries formed a single army.'<sup>135</sup>

In fact, the formation of this 'single army' of the proletariat was only to appear from 1917 onwards, with the upsurge of the Russian and worldwide revolution. This consciousness of belonging to the same army of the world-revolution was the product of the split during the war between the revolutionary current and the Social Democracy. Overwhelmed by the nationalist wave in 1914, the revolution got back on its feet to stand up against the war.

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133 Schorske 1981, p. 109.

134 Quoted by Kautsky, in Grünenberg 1983, p. 349.

135 Pannekoek, 'Die Internationale in Basel', *Bremer Bürgerzeitung*, 23 November 1912. Unlike Gorter, at the time Pannekoek saw the Basle Congress as 'the International's first council of war' and the realisation of the unity of the International, 'which had not been the case until 1910'.

## The Dutch Tribunist Current and the First World-War (1914–18)

### 1 Social Democracy and Tribunism Facing the War

Although the Netherlands maintained its neutrality during the First World-War, and so was spared its terrible destruction and bloodletting, the war nonetheless constantly haunted the population. The German army's invasion of Belgium brought the war to the very border. As the conflict dragged on, it seemed inevitable that the Dutch bourgeoisie would enter the war, either on Germany's side or on that of the Entente. The socialist movement thus had to determine clearly its attitude either for or against the war, whether to support its own government or struggle against it.

In reality, the 'neutrality' of the non-belligerents was a façade. Switzerland, Denmark, Sweden, Norway and the Netherlands were discreetly pro-German. But this support was all the more discreet in that they gained considerable commercial advantages from both camps. For the Dutch bourgeoisie, the war provided an undreamt-of opportunity to get rich quickly, and to develop its industrial apparatus. According to Henriëtte Roland Holst, the Netherlands made more war-profits than any other industrial and colonial power.<sup>1</sup> It became a lynchpin for the trade in raw materials, foodstuffs, and military equipment. Foreign capital, mostly German, invested massively in Dutch industry. Internationally active banks developed extremely fast. Nowhere in war-torn Europe did financial capital develop so fast and so strongly, in so little time. Similarly, the traditionally-backward Dutch industry was considerably developed: Limburg coal-production doubled; the machine-tool- and shipbuilding-sectors expanded. An efficient state-capitalism was built up, controlling imports and exports under the aegis of the N.O.T. (*Nederlandsche Overzee Trustmaatschappij*). The result was a decline of small companies and a growth in large ones, due to industrial concentration. The numbers of industrial workers increased, creating more favourable conditions for Tribunist, then Communist, propaganda. Finally, the war provided the opportunity for an increased exploitation of the Dutch colonies, especially in Indonesia: the production of oil, rubber, tea, sugar

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1 Roland Holst 1902, pp. 117–68.

and tobacco all increased rapidly, with the resulting impoverishment of the Indonesian peasants. The colonial question was thus posed starkly within the Tribunist and Communist movement.

The Dutch bourgeoisie had another reason, apart from its substantial war-profits, for remaining 'neutral'. It was, in fact, profoundly divided between two, almost equal, factions: one pro-Entente, the other pro-German, supporting the Central Powers (minus Italy, which abandoned the Triple Alliance for the Entente in 1915).

Despite this, and in expectation of an extension of the war, the Dutch bourgeoisie very quickly put the country on a war-footing. On 30 July 1914, the liberal government of Cort van der Linden (1846–1935) decreed a partial mobilisation, followed the next day by a general mobilisation. It was the first in Europe after those of Serbia and Austria-Hungary. The population panicked; banks and food-shops were taken by storm.

For the bourgeoisie, this mobilisation was above all a way of testing how far the workers would support an eventual war, and how far the official Social Democracy was integrated into the bourgeois nation-state.

As in most of the belligerent countries, the official Social Democracy rapidly succumbed to nationalism. The SDAP crossed the Rubicon by rejecting the internationalism that was still a part of its programme, leading to a crisis in the party, which reached its culmination in 1915 (see below).

From the outbreak of war, Troelstra declared himself 'in principle on the side of the government'. On 3 August 1914, even before the German Social Democracy, the SDAP voted for war-credits. It emphasised unambiguously its desire for the Sacred Union (*Godsvrede* or *Union sacrée*) with the Dutch bourgeoisie: 'the national idea predominates over national disagreements', Troelstra solemnly declared to Parliament.<sup>2</sup>

However, while it stood alongside the government in the Sacred Union, throughout the war the SDAP officially conducted an international policy that made it appear as a partisan of neutralism. In fact, from the outset a majority of the SDAP was pro-German. In October 1914, Troelstra himself had an interview with the German deputy foreign-affairs minister Zimmermann in Berlin, regarding the closer economic union between the Netherlands and Germany that would follow the victory of the Central Powers. In April 1918, Troelstra was to be consulted as a 'man of confidence' by the German government.<sup>3</sup>

2 See De Kadt 1965, p. 43. See also Rojahn 1985, p. 24.

3 Koejemans 1967, p. 141.

However, a significant minority openly favoured the victory of the Entente; this was the case for the reformist Vliegen and the Marxist intellectual Van der Goes.<sup>4</sup> Only a handful of internationalist Marxists, such as A.B. Soep, an old friend of Gorter's, defended resolutely internationalist positions, against all imperialism<sup>5</sup>

The SDAP profited from its official 'neutrality' to try to keep alive the Second International, an International which had blown apart on 4 August 1914, when its main member-parties had voted for war-credits. Troelstra arranged for the International Socialist Bureau, which the French Socialists refused to join, to be moved to The Hague, where it fell under the control of the SDAP and the German Social Democracy.<sup>6</sup> When the Italian and Swiss socialists proposed the convocation of a conference of parties from the 'neutral' countries, Troelstra refused to hear of it. Troelstra later became the head of the Dutch-Scandinavian Commission, which tried, right up to the abortive Stockholm Conference of 1917, to take over the leadership of the socialist parties of the neutral countries in order to 'restore' the Second International.

The SDAP's 'neutrality' allowed it to avoid the shock of repeated splits. Throughout the war, the Dutch proletariat maintained an attitude of growing hostility to the world-conflict. Despite the economic boom, the war caused a drastic slump in working-class living-conditions. Foodstuffs were exported to Germany, and rationing became the rule. Moreover, the brutal induction of a part of the youth into the army disorganised production at first. Unemployment grew considerably, from 7.4 percent to 27 percent! At the end of 1914, there were more than 40,000 unemployed in Amsterdam. For Dutch workers, the reality of the war was greater poverty and more unemployment. The general mobil-

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4 Sam de Wolff (1878–1960) describes the state of the SDAP on the eve of war in De Wolff 1978. Vliegen suggested (in *Het Volk* of 5 August 1914, 'Hollands positie') that the Netherlands should enter the war alongside the Entente. To keep the SDAP in 'semi-neutrality', Troelstra took over the management of *Het Volk*.

5 Abraham B. Soep (1874–1958), diamond-worker, then socialist publisher, was initially a member of Domela Nieuwenhuis's SDB from 1894. He joined the SDAP in 1899; then was active (after 1905) in the diamond-workers' movement in Antwerp; he became a member of the RSV in 1915–16; member of the CPH, then in Belgium a founder of the Belgian CP, he joined the RSP in 1932, then the RSAP of Sneevliet, where he criticised Trotskyist positions. He was in contact with the 'Bordigist' review *Bilan* during the 1930s.

His principal theoretical contribution remains his pamphlet *Nationalisme of internationalisme?* (Soep 1915). For the biography of Bram Soep, see Stutje 1991.

6 Rojahn 1985, pp. 41–51. For the SDAP, the aim was 'to make sure that after the war, the International would still be standing, with all its power and all its sections', in the sense of avoiding splits.

isation made the danger of war seem imminent. Moreover, the government conducted a constant propaganda for the Sacred Union and an end to workers' strikes.<sup>7</sup>

Threatened by the horror of war, and subjected to a brutal poverty, the proletariat showed itself highly combative right from the outset. Under its pressure, the SDAP was forced to hold a meeting of protest against the war, attended by 15,000 people, on 31 July 1914. Strikes against unemployment broke out, for example that of 10,000 diamond-workers in Amsterdam.<sup>8</sup> Street-demonstrations against unemployment and the high cost of living began in 1915, and continued throughout the war. Meetings against the war and its effects found an audience that was increasingly attentive and combative, and even receptive to revolutionary ideas.

It should be noted that the ideas that were best received among the workers mixed anti-militarism and internationalism. Nonetheless, pacifist ideas of a return to peace and 'immediate demobilisation' seemed to predominate. Under Domela Nieuwenhuis's influence, a strong, organised anti-militarism had developed in the Netherlands since the turn of the century, although it was coloured with pacifism. The International Anti-Militarist Association (IAMV) had been founded in Amsterdam in 1904. Its Dutch section, which published the periodical *De Wapens neder!* ('Down with weapons!'), was the most active. Under the authority of Domela Nieuwenhuis, who remained internationalist, it never took on a purely pacifist colouring. Although it remained 'libertarian', it maintained its links with the Tribunist SDP; but its strongest ties were with the small group of the anarchist Gerhard Rijnders: Social-Anarchist Action (SAA), established in 1917.<sup>9</sup> For a small country like the Netherlands, its periodical had a considerable circulation.<sup>10</sup> The reason was that the vast majority of anarchists and syndicalist revolutionaries refused to join the Sacred Union. Would this have stood up in the face of the Dutch army's joining one of the two camps? It is by no means certain that it would have done.

Alongside the expansion of the anti-militarist movement, there was a renewal of the revolutionary-syndicalist current. The NAS grew from 10,000 to

7 Burger 1983, p. 20.

8 R. De Jong 1973.

9 In the Dutch revolutionary-syndicalist current, only Christiaan Cornelissen openly choose to support the Entente. He signed the *'Manifesto of the Sixteen'* in Paris together with Kropotkin, the 'prince of the trenches', issue by various anarchists committed to the French camp. This was vigorously condemned by the Italian Malatesta and many European anarchists.

10 In 1905 *De Wapens Neder!* had a circulation of 15,000 copies and more.

30,000 members during the war. It provided the best support – the mass-base, we might say – for the SDP. Its conceptions, more pacifist than revolutionary, progressively penetrated the SDP. However, the latter also had a marked influence, in a Marxist direction, on the NAS's new recruits. The relationship between the NAS and the SDP thus remained ambiguous, just like those, later, between the Communist Party (CPH) and this same union.

For its part, the SDP committed itself resolutely against the war and the Sacred Union. The 1 August 1914 issue of *De Tribune* had the headline 'War on War!'. A manifesto, signed by the SDP, the NAS, the sailors', construction- and shipyard-workers' unions, and the IAMV proclaimed: 'Workers, protest, organise meetings, do everything that can preserve peace. War on war'. The SDP was only repeating the slogans of the Basle Congress, but without yet expanding on them – as Lenin did as soon as war broke out – into revolutionary perspectives, through the transformation of the war into proletarian revolution. Another manifesto, published in *De Tribune* on 31 December 1914, declared itself for the demobilisation of the Dutch army. All the SDP's propaganda was thus focused on the struggle against the war and for demobilisation.

The SDP's policy was far from clear. It even tended to distance itself from the positions of radical Marxism. From August 1914 onwards, the SDP had, indeed, chosen to form – together with the NAS, the IAMV and the SAA – a cartel of organisations known as the 'active workers' unions' (SAV; *Samenwerkende Arbeiders Vereenigingen*). This cartel, into which the SDP merged, appeared to be less an organisation for revolutionary struggle against the war than an anti-militarist cartel with an inevitably pacifist colouring, given its failure to declare the proletarian revolution the necessary means of putting an end to the war.<sup>11</sup> For the SAV, which was an important part of the cartel, the main goal was the return to peace through demobilisation. Many of them recommended individualist solutions, such as the refusal to perform military service. This activity made clear headway amongst syndicalist circles.

Within the SDP itself, a part of the leadership peddled conceptions which were far from Tribunism's initial intransigence. Thus Van Ravesteyn, amongst others, declared for 'arming the people' in case the Netherlands should be invaded.<sup>12</sup> This would have meant the workers joining the war, which would thus become 'just' by being 'defensive'. This was already an old position in the Second International. It tried to reconcile the irreconcilable: patriotism,

<sup>11</sup> Burger 1983, p. 18.

<sup>12</sup> By 1916, voices were being raised in the SDP against the danger posed to the SDP by the anarchist and syndicalist movements. The SDP's left-opposition, later accused of 'anarchism' and 'syndicalism', was formed against the syndicalist current.

which 'armament of the people' would transform into 'workers' patriotism', and internationalism. This position was not dissimilar to that of Jaurès in his book *L'Armée nouvelle*. Even revolutionaries as intransigent as Rosa Luxemburg still defended this old idea, inherited from the outdated epoch of bourgeois revolutions: in 1914, this conception led directly to the socialist parties' adherence to 'social-patriotism', and support for their national bourgeoisies. But in the case of Rosa Luxemburg, a passing ambiguity<sup>13</sup> was quickly overcome by a formal rejection of any national war in the epoch of imperialism.<sup>14</sup> Van Ravesteyn and his partisans returned to the idea of the national defence of 'little countries' threatened by the 'great powers'. And yet it was exactly this conception of the 'just war' that the Serbian socialists had so strongly rejected in August 1914 by refusing to vote for war-credits and calling for international revolution.<sup>15</sup> To defend this position, the SDP minority could stand on the party-programme, which demanded 'the introduction of a generalised arming of the people to replace the permanent army'.

The SDP congress of June 1915, held in Utrecht, was the opportunity for the Marxist left to denounce any idea of 'national defence', even for small countries. In the name of the Bussum section, Gorter proposed a resolution rejecting 'the militarism of the capitalist classes in any form, even that of a so-called popular army to defend independence or neutrality'.<sup>16</sup> This Bussum resolution rejected any possibility of small nations fighting a 'defensive war'. Their proletariat

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- 13 De Liagre Böhl 1973, p. 146. Van Ravesteyn's 'arming the people' was already directed against Germany. In *De Tribune* of 18 November 1914, he expressed his joy at the defeat of the German army in the Battle of the Marne.
  - 14 In the *Junius Pamphlet* (*The crisis in the social democracy*), April 1915, Luxemburg attacked the parliamentary Social-Democratic group for having 'left the fatherland without defence in its hour of greatest danger. For its first duty to the fatherland at this moment was to show it the real underside of this imperialist war', to 'tear up the tissue of diplomatic and patriotic lies which camouflaged this outrage against the fatherland'. Lenin could reproach *Junius* for 'falling into this extremely strange error, of trying at all costs to reconcile a national programme to this war, which is not national'. See Lenin 1964a, pp. 305–19.
  - 15 The 'Theses on the tasks of the social democracy', attached to the *Junius Pamphlet* as an appendix, defined the world-war as imperialist. Luxemburg emphasised the difference with the 'national wars' of the nineteenth century. All wars are imperialist: 'In the epoch of this unrestrained militarism, there can be no more national wars. National interests are only a mystification whose aim is to put the labouring masses at the service of their mortal enemy: imperialism' (Lenin 1964a, p. 220).
  - 16 The Serbian, Bulgarian and Romanian socialists declared against the war, despite belonging to small nations. See Humbert-Droz 1968, pp. 64–7.

had the same internationalist duties as that of the large countries: 'the solid socialist interest of the proletariat in these countries demands that it follow a tactic in accord with that of the proletariat in larger countries, and with even more energy in those which – like Belgium and the Netherlands – themselves have great imperialist interests.' The resolution was adopted by a crushing majority.

In the same resolution, Gorter included a passage rejecting pacifism, which had infiltrated the SDP under the cover of radical phrases. It was aimed at the Groningen section which, like the anarchists, declared on principle that it 'fought and rejected any military organisation and all military spending'.<sup>17</sup>

The Groningen militants' abstract purism in fact simply avoided the question of the proletarian revolution. According to them, the revolution could only be peaceful, and they did not pose the concrete problem of arming the workers before the seizure of power, and thus the military organisation of the proletariat. It led to a denial of the complex military problems that would follow the seizure of power: the direction of production towards armaments, in order to defend the new proletarian power against the attacks of the counter-revolution. Finally, accepting the Groningen section's position would have meant that the SDP was sliding into pacifism, a danger that was all the more real in that it was amalgamated in a cartel of organisations of a pacifist or anti-militarist orientation. The adoption of Gorter's resolution, by 432 votes to 26, was thus a clear rejection of pacifist ideology, even if it was peddled under the guise of anti-militarist phraseology. The resolution showed that the SDP's prime task was the struggle for the revolution, and thus for the arming of the workers: 'If the workers take power one day, they will have to defend it guns in hand'.<sup>18</sup>

The SDP left thus clearly posed the question of whether the struggle for peace and against militarism should come before the struggle against capitalism. The Utrecht Congress had answered no. The fact that there were still hesitations within the SDP could be seen from Pannekoek's articles of the time, which supported Gorter. In an article published in *De Tribune* on 19 June 1915, Pannekoek declared: 'the struggle against militarism can only bring results as part of the general struggle against capitalism'.<sup>19</sup>

Similarly, the proletariat could not adopt the slogan of peace, unless it was accompanied by an energetic struggle against capitalism. In another article

17 Gorter's resolution was adopted by a crushing majority of 432 votes to 26. See de Liagre Böhl 1973, p. 142.

18 See *De Tribune*, 17 July 1915, p. 3, col. 1.

19 Pannekoek, 'De strijd tegen het militarisme', in *De Tribune*, 19 June 1915.



on Social Democracy and war,<sup>20</sup> published in *De Nieuwe Tijd* in 1915, Pannekoek again emphasised that pacifism was also supported by ‘wide strata of the bourgeoisie’, and that ‘it is not by words, but by deeds, and actions, [that] the proletariat can exercise an influence on peace’. Gorter and Pannekoek targeted the political vacillation that had emerged in the SDP, and not only the pacifist conceptions being spread at the time by Roland Holst (see below). Nonetheless, the SDP’s theoretical positions on the war remained clear. They belonged to the same orientation as the Marxist left in Germany, and above all in Russia. But in the end, Gorter’s and Pannekoek’s positions had a greater real echo in the international revolutionary movement than in the SDP.

Along with Lenin, Luxemburg, Pannekoek and Radek, at the beginning of the war Gorter was the Marxist theoretician who explained most coherently the death of the International and the nature of war in the imperialist epoch, and drew out all its practical implications for the revolutionary struggle.

## 2 Gorter’s Political and Theoretical Combat against the War

In December 1914, the SDP publishing-house brought out Gorter’s main theoretical and political contribution to the struggle against the war: *Imperialism, the World War, and the Social Democracy*. This pamphlet, quickly republished several times in Dutch, was immediately translated into German to advance the struggle against the Social Democracy at the international level.<sup>21</sup> It met with a considerable echo, not just in the Russian emigrant-milieu in Switzerland, but also in Germany. In the Netherlands, even anti-Marxist anarchists like Domela Nieuwenhuis welcomed Gorter’s pamphlet and helped to distribute it.<sup>22</sup>

Gorter’s pamphlet seems to have been completely unaware of the Bolsheviks’ positions, since they, and in particular Lenin, are never quoted or mentioned for their radical positions. It is true that the Bolshevik positions only began to come to the attention of the Dutch Marxists in the summer of 1915,

20 Pannekoek, ‘De Sociaal-Democratie en de oorlog’, *De Nieuwe Tijd*, February 1915, pp. 137–151.

21 The pamphlet went through four editions in Dutch during the war. Lenin eagerly set to reading it with the help of a Dutch-German dictionary. He enthusiastically sent Gorter his ‘cordial congratulations’ in a letter to Wijnkoop of 12 March 1915 (quoted by De Liagre Böhl 1973, p. 133).

22 See De Wolff 1978, p. 143.

during the preparations for the Zimmerwald Conference. It was only then that the Dutch began to publish Lenin's articles. On 31 July 1915, *De Tribune* published Lenin's article 'War and Revolution'.

Gorter's analyses were remarkable. The pamphlet was written in October 1914, just as Lenin was writing his major texts against the war, and went in entirely the same direction. Not only did they define the war as imperialist, they also proclaimed – with the collapse of the Second International – the need for a new International, through an uncompromising struggle against the Kautskyist centre. The content diverged from the Bolshevik analysis only by its slogans. Lenin's leitmotiv – the need to 'transform the imperialist war into a civil war' – is nowhere mentioned. Gorter insisted, above all, on the necessary resumption of the class-struggle in the form of 'mass-action'. Alongside slogans – defended by both Lenin and Luxemburg – such as the refusal 'to make any compromises or alliances with any bourgeois party whatsoever', or the rejection 'even in the case of war, of any credits for militarism and imperialism', we can find the germ of future positions of the Dutch-German communist left. Like Rosa Luxemburg, Gorter rejected national-liberation struggles (except for Indonesia!), and he also advocated fighting the bourgeoisie 'other than with the usual means of union and parliamentary struggle'.

Gorter's pamphlet demonstrated his complete political and theoretical agreement with Pannekoek's analyses. In October 1914, the latter had proclaimed the death of the Second International, riddled with opportunism and reformism: 'The Second International is dead; it has been ingloriously consumed in the worldwide fire. But this death is no accident. It only means that the International was dead inside'.<sup>23</sup>

The burning question for the Dutch Marxists was thus, as it was for Lenin and Luxemburg, how to evaluate the period, and to call into question the tactics used by the Second International, in order to start again on a more solid basis.

## 2.1 *The Nature of the War*

Like all Marxists of the time, Gorter analysed the world-conflict in the framework of the evolution of capitalism. This evolution meant capital's establishment worldwide, in its constant search for new markets. Nonetheless, the economic element in Gorter's pamphlet was very sketchy; it was more a description of the stages of capitalist expansion into the colonies and semi-colonies than

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23 Pannekoek, 'De ineensstorting van de Internationale', *De Nieuwe Tijd*, October 1914, pp. 677–8.

it was a real theoretical explanation of the imperialist phenomenon. In some ways, Gorter was closer to Lenin than to Luxemburg.<sup>24</sup> Gorter's analyses were close to those of Luxemburg, above all on the political level, declaring vigorously that every state is imperialist and that there can be no such thing as national liberation, contrary to Lenin during the First World-War:<sup>25</sup> 'All states have an imperialist policy and want to extend their territory.'<sup>26</sup> The world-proletarian struggle cannot thus be directed against each bourgeoisie taken nationally.

Unlike Liebknecht, who declared that 'the main enemy is at home', Gorter insisted that there is no 'main' enemy, an enemy number one and number two; on the contrary, what mattered was the struggle against all imperialisms, since the workers' struggle was no longer situated on a national, but on a worldwide terrain: 'The national imperialism threatens the proletariat as much as the imperialism of other nations. Consequently, for the proletariat as a whole it is necessary to struggle in the same way, in other words, with equal energy, against all imperialisms, its own as well as foreign imperialism.'<sup>27</sup>

## 2.2 *The Decline of the Capitalist System*

Gorter did not grasp the capitalist system's decadence as a theoretician, basing himself on a historical and economic study. He analysed its social and cultural effects. The world-war was a direct threat to the proletariat's very existence. The birth of world-capitalism was the final result of a historical evolution leading to a fight to the death between the proletariat and world-capital:

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24 Like Lenin, Gorter defined imperialism phenomenologically. It was not, as Rosa Luxemburg insisted, a result of the saturation of the world-market, but of the control of the world-economy by the trusts, the banks and the financial and industrial monopolies. On the level of economic theory, the Dutch left always set itself apart from Luxemburg's analyses. In 1913, Pannekoek was one of the harshest critics of Luxemburg's book *The Accumulation of Capital*, which was published that same year.

25 In his critique of the *Junius Pamphlet*, Lenin's response (written in July 1916) to the question of whether or not all 'national-liberation struggles' were necessarily absorbed into the conflicts between the great imperialist powers, was evasive: 'Every war is a continuation of politics by other means. The national liberation politics of the colonies will *inevitably* be continued by national wars of the colonies *against* imperialism. Such wars *may* lead to an imperialist war between the present "Great" imperialist Powers or they may not; that depends on many circumstances.' Lenin 1964a, pp. 305–19.

26 Translated from the Italian edition: Gorter 1920a, p. 10.

27 Gorter 1920a, p. 47.

Times have changed. Capitalism is so developed that it can continue its further development only by massacring the proletariat of every country. A world-capital is born, which is making a turn against the world-proletariat ... World-imperialism threatens the working class of the whole world.<sup>28</sup>

It comes as no surprise that Gorter, the great poet, should be particularly sensitive to the crisis of artistic values, an undeniable sign of the decline of capitalist civilisation. His judgement was hasty, since he leaves out the new art-forms which appeared after the war, strongly inspired by the revolutionary wave of 1917–23 (expressionism, surrealism ...). But, above all, Gorter shows capitalism's inability to create new great art, in the image of an expanding social system, as was the case during the nineteenth century:

Great art is dead today. In every country, great poetry is dead; dead are impressionism, naturalism, the great bourgeois realism ... Great architecture is dead. What architecture is left is heartless, loveless. Music is a mere shadow of what it was. Great painting is dead. Philosophy is dead; the very rise of the proletariat has killed it.<sup>29</sup>

This vision of the 'decadence' (death crisis, according to the left-communist terminology) of the capitalist system in all its forms was not limited to Gorter. It lay at the basis of the foundation of the Third International, and of the left-communist currents after the war, especially the German communist left, strongly influenced by Luxemburg, Gorter, and Pannekoek.

### 2.3 *The Bankruptcy of Social Democracy and Kautskyism*

Like Lenin, Luxemburg and Pannekoek, Gorter showed that the war was made possible by the treason of those parties which 'renounced socialist ideas'.<sup>30</sup> He emphasised that the process of the Second International's collapse had been prepared by successive repudiations of the struggle against war and the economic struggle. It was the subjective factor which finally gave the international bourgeoisie a free hand to enter into war in 1914. No-one could grasp the rottenness of its adversary within the proletariat better than the bourgeoisie, a class condemned by history and with all the intelligence of a class hanging on for its own survival as society's ruling class. Already in 1912, at the Basle Congress, 'The

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28 Gorter 1920a, p. 42.

29 Gorter 1920a, p. 53.

30 Gorter 1920a, p. 29.

bourgeoisie, which, thanks to its own rottenness, has a very sensitive nose for moral decomposition, immediately scented the way this congress of the International was going. It felt that there was nothing to fear from such a congress. It put Basle Cathedral at our disposal ...'<sup>31</sup>

For the Dutch left – which, moreover, had been prevented from speaking during the congress – Basle was only the ultimate conclusion of a long decline. 4 August 1914 was prefigured by Basle: no more than a great Mass against the war, with an abundance of pacifist incense.

However, Gorter did not analyse the Second International's betrayal as merely the treachery of the leadership. Like Pannekoek, in his article cited above,<sup>32</sup> he went into greater depth, defining the organisational, tactical and political factors which led to this bankruptcy. The causes he addressed all raised the burning question: what is the real state of class-consciousness, its degree of revolutionary maturity?

It is significant that Gorter was hesitant in explaining the International's bankruptcy. He insisted strongly on the fact that the revisionists and the Kautskyite centrists were 'equally responsible for the nationalism and the chauvinism of the masses'.<sup>33</sup> On the other hand, like Pannekoek and Robert Michels before him, he sketched out the theory developed in the 1920 *Open Letter to Comrade Lenin*, on the opposition between 'masses' and 'leaders'.<sup>34</sup> The proletarian masses had been deprived of the capacity for revolutionary action by the bureaucratisation of the Social Democracy, with its army of paid officials and functionaries: 'The centre of gravity shifted ... from the masses to the lead-

31 Gorter 1920a, p. 115.

32 Pannekoek, 'De Sociaaldemocratie en de oorlog', *De Nieuwe Tijd*, February 1915, pp. 69–84, 137–51.

33 Gorter 1920a.

34 Gorter, like Lenin, carefully distinguished between the leaders who had betrayed internationalism, and the masses who passively suffered a nationalism which was only attached to 'a primary instinct of self-preservation' (Gorter 1920a, p. 63). Roland Holst, by contrast, in her pamphlet *Het socialistisch proletariaat en de vrede*, tried to show that the problem was not the betrayal by the leaderships of the Social-Democratic parties, but the existence of the 'national factor', which had submerged internationalism in 1914. Unlike Gorter, she came to the conclusion that it was 'untrue that the present war, in its essence and its expressions is nothing other than a struggle between super-capitalist groups for financial and economic hegemony' (Roland Holst 1915, p. 13). She did not speak of Social Democracy's betrayal, and called on the latter to 'take account of national feeling, as a living and very robust ideology, which has not had its day, but is also rooted in the present' (Roland Holst 1915, p. 12). This was still a typically 'Kautskyist' viewpoint. Roland Holst spoke in favour of liberty and 'peace'.

ers. A labour-bureaucracy was formed. However, the bureaucracy is, by its very nature, conservative.<sup>35</sup>

But Gorter, who was a Marxist to the core, could not be satisfied with a merely sociological analysis.<sup>36</sup> The question of the organisation of parties as emanations of the International, was the decisive one. For Gorter, as later for the Italian communist left,<sup>37</sup> the International came before the national parties, not the other way round. The Second International's bankruptcy was to be explained essentially by its federalist nature: 'In reality, the Second International's debacle came because it was not international. It was a conglomeration of national organisations, and not an international body'.<sup>38</sup>

In the end, all these causes explain the retreat of proletarian consciousness in the war. The proletariat was 'severely weakened', and 'spiritually demoralised'. But for Gorter, just as for Lenin and Pannekoek, this was a retreat, not an irreparable defeat. The revolution would necessarily spring from the war.

#### 2.4 *The Future*

The very conditions of capitalism's evolution provided the objective conditions necessary for the unification of the world-proletariat. The revolution could only be worldwide: 'For the first time in world-history, the whole proletariat is today united thanks to imperialism, in peace as in war, as one whole, in a struggle which cannot be conducted without the common will of the international proletariat, against the international bourgeoisie'.<sup>39</sup>

However, Gorter insisted strongly that the revolution would unfold as a long-term process 'extending over decades and decades'. 'Spiritual factors' would be decisive. Above all, the class-struggle demanded a radical change in tactics; it would be a struggle adapted to the imperialist epoch, no longer by the means of trade-unionism or Parliament, but by the mass-strike. Although it remained undeveloped, this point – which appears on the pamphlet's final page – pre-figured the left-communist conception, which was developed fully in 1920.

The proletariat's political struggle was just as decisive. It had to fight both revisionism, which had gone over to the bourgeoisie, and centrism represented

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35 Gorter 1920a, p. 72.

36 This is what Robert Michels tends to do in his 1911 *Zur Soziologie des Parteiwesens in der modernen Demokratie* (Michels 1911). Pannekoek corresponded with him briefly in 1905. See. Malandrino 1985, pp. 467–92.

37 Such as *Bilan*, the periodical of the Italian Communist Fraction ('Bordigist') during the 1930s.

38 Gorter 1920a, p. 127.

39 Gorter 1920a, p. 22.

by Kautsky, but also by Roland Holst, who represented the centrist current in the Netherlands. While Kautsky's current was not bourgeois, but rather a pseudo-'radical' current which wanted to 'turn back the wheel of history' by advocating 'an impotent, utopian resistance' to imperialism, it was all the more dangerous in its centrism. It served as a bridge to the bourgeois current of the Social Democracy, and should be fought as such.

But 'centrism' was most dangerous in its pacifist guise. To take the revolutionary road, the proletariat had first to reject the struggle for peace, advocated by the pacifist currents within the workers' movement: 'Both as hypocrisy and self-deceit, and as a means for better enslaving and exploiting, the pacifist movement is the other side of the imperialist coin ... The pacifist movement is an attack by bourgeois imperialism against proletarian socialism.'<sup>40</sup> Finally, and above all, without a real International, created by the proletariat itself, there could be no real revolutionary movement. There was no shadow of doubt as to the possibility of a 'new International' emerging from the war. Unlike Lenin in September 1914, Gorter did not yet call this the Third International.

Gorter's pamphlet was hailed as a model by Lenin, who had also read Pannekoek's articles against the war, nationalism, and Kautskyism. With its radical analyses, it broke with the position adopted by Henriëtte Roland Holst who, at the same moment, defended a pacifist viewpoint in her pamphlet *The socialist proletariat and peace* (December 1914), without mentioning the 'betrayal' of the Social Democracy and the need for a new International.<sup>41</sup>

### 3 The SDP and the Zimmerwald Conference

Gorter's pamphlet and Pannekoek's articles posed concretely the necessity of renewing international links among the Marxist groups, in order to lay the foundations for the 'new International'.

It is significant that their position, in favour of working energetically for the international regroupment of all socialists opposed to the war and the partisans of a new International, remained an isolated one within their own party. Gorter and Pannekoek wanted the SDP to participate wholeheartedly in the International Conference – advocated by the Bolsheviks, amongst others – at the end of summer 1915.

<sup>40</sup> Gorter 1920a, p. 151.

<sup>41</sup> Roland Holst 1915, pp. 734–52 and 764–83.

The idea of renewing international relations among parties of the Second International opposed to the war, originated in the parties of 'neutral' countries. Already, on 27 September 1914, a conference took place in Lugano (Switzerland) between the Swiss and Italian parties. The conference proposed to 'struggle by every means against the further extension of the war to other countries'. Another conference of 'neutral parties' was held on 17–18 January 1915 in Copenhagen, with delegates from the Scandinavian parties and the SDAP (the same party which had excluded the Tribunists in 1909). Neither conference had any echo in the workers' movement. They proposed to reaffirm 'the principles of the International', which had died on 4 August 1914. But whereas the Dutch and Scandinavians reformists appealed to the International Socialist Bureau to hold a peace-conference of the parties that had adopted 'social chauvinism', the Swiss and Italian parties edged hesitantly towards a split. In January 1915, for example, the Swiss SP voted to stop paying subscriptions to the late Second International. The split was only a timid one, since the conference of the Swiss and Italian parties held in Zürich in May 1915 passed a resolution calling for 'the forgetting of the weaknesses and faults of brother-parties in other countries'.<sup>42</sup> In the midst of a military bloodbath, the slogans of 'general disarmament' and 'non-violent annexations' were put forward.

During 1915, opposition to the war began to increase throughout Europe, giving impetus to the movement which was to lead to Zimmerwald. In Britain, the first great strikes of the war began in February, in the Clyde Valley. At the same time in Germany, the first food-riots broke out, where working-class women protested against rationing. In the Netherlands itself, working-class women were later to play an important part in the struggle against the war. In Russia, from May until August, strikes spread through the textile-industry. Political opposition to the war emerged from hiding. On 20 March, Otto Rühle, who until then had voted for war-credits 'out of discipline', joined Liebknecht in voting against, while thirty Social-Democrat deputies abstained by leaving the Reichstag. There was a significant renewal of revolutionary forces. Alongside the 'International Socialists' who published *Lichtsstrahlen* ('Rays of Light') and were close to the Bolsheviks and the Bremen *Linksradikale*, Rosa Luxemburg's group distributed thousands of leaflets against the war, and in April published the first issue of *Die Internationale*, calling for the 'reconstruction of the International'. Even in France, where chauvinism was particularly strong, reactions against the war appeared. Unlike Germany, these came first from the revolutionary syndicalists around Monatte, influenced by Trotsky and his

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42 See Humbert-Droz 1968 and Lademacher 1967.



group *Nashe Slovo* ('Our Word'). In the engineers' and teachers' federations of the Isère and the Rhône, the majority declared against the 'Sacred Union'. Within the Socialist Party, the Haute-Vienne federation took the same line.

These were the preconditions for the Zimmerwald movement. Within the socialist parties, a *de facto* split was under way over the question of war and the break with 'social-chauvinism', which posed the question of reorganising the revolutionary International. It was addressed in the two conferences held in Bern in the spring. The conference of socialist women, held over 25–27 March, did so negatively: though it declared 'war on war', it refused to condemn the 'social patriots', or to consider a new International. The Bolshevik delegates left the conference, refusing to endorse an ambiguous attitude. The second conference, of the international socialist youth, responded positively: it decided to establish an autonomous international youth-bureau, and to publish a periodical, *Jugend Internationale*, to fight against the Second International. In a manifesto, the delegates declared their support for 'all revolutionary actions, and all class-struggle'. 'It is a hundred times better to die in prison as victims of the revolutionary struggle, than to fall on the battlefield in a struggle against our own comrades from other countries, in the name of our enemies' thirst for profit.'<sup>43</sup>

The Dutch Young Socialists, close to the Tribunist SDP, joined this radical tendency. In the Netherlands, within the SDAP itself, militants opposed to their party's nationalist policy – made official at the Arnhem Congress in April 1915 – had come together in a 'Revolutionary-Socialist Club' in Amsterdam. The initiative came from Wout Wolda, and above all from A.B. Soep, who had been prevented from speaking against nationalism at the congress, and who had published a pamphlet with the significant title of *Nationalism or Internationalism?* They decided to create a federation of clubs, which took the name of *Revolutionair Socialistisch Verbond* (RSV, 'Revolutionary-Socialist Union'). They wanted to develop opposition to the war, both inside and outside the SDAP. However the RSV leadership included elements who did not belong to Troelstra's SDAP. The RSV's recognised spokesman was Roland Holst, who had been outside any party since leaving the SDAP in 1912. Essentially composed of intellectuals, the RSV had little influence among the working class. Its reduced numbers – a hundred members at the most – gave it more the appearance of a cartel than an organisation. Its members were organisationally very confused: many were still in the SDAP, and so belonged to two organisations. This situation was

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43 *Jugend Internationale*, No. 1, Zürich, 1 September 1915. 1972 Reprint: *Jugend Internationale. Die elf historische Nummern der Kriegsausgabe 1915–1918*, Berlin: Verlag Neuer Kurs.

to last for several months, until they were expelled from the SDAP, or left voluntarily. No less vague was the attitude of the members of the Tribunist SDP, who although they were members of a revolutionary organisation, nonetheless joined the RSV. The SDP's Utrecht Congress of 20 June 1915 had to be very firm in banning membership of multiple organisations. Those who had joined the RSV since 2 May 1915 were required to leave it.<sup>44</sup>

Politically, the RSV (like Roland Holst), can be considered as a 'centrist' group, between the SDAP and the SDP. On the one hand, it declared for 'national and international mass-action', for the renewal of class-movements; on the other, it refused to condemn the SDAP's attitude to the war, in the name of a unity which should be concretised by the 'concentration of all revolutionary workers'. Nonetheless, this hesitation did not prevent an increasingly active collaboration between the RSV and the SDP. However, in concrete practice the SDP – although it was clearer politically and theoretically – was to trail the RSV when, in 1915, the renewal of international relations between revolutionary groups, which had been broken by the war, became a reality.

From the outbreak of war, Lenin had, naturally, made contact with the Dutch. He urged the SDP to 'create closer ties' between the Russians and the Dutch.<sup>45</sup> He was certainly not thinking of an association with Roland Holst, whom he saw – since she had adopted a centrist attitude towards the Tribunists in 1909 – as another Trotsky, or even Kautsky, transplanted into the Netherlands.<sup>46</sup>

But the SDP remained divided over a clear activity of close collaboration with the German and Russian revolutionaries. A small minority of the party-leadership around Gorter was determined to carry out international work against social-chauvinism and the Kautskyist centre. Gorter thus proposed to

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44 *De Tribune*, 17 July 1915. The RSV published a monthly *De Internationale*. The RSV was represented under this name at Zimmerwald by Roland Holst. Sneevliet left the SDAP to join the RSV in March 1916, then the SDP in Indonesia. In 1912, he had already left the SDAP for the SDP. A year later, he rejoined the SDAP upon his departure for Indonesia.

45 Letter from Lenin, in Wiessing 1980, pp. 33–4.

46 After Zimmerwald, Lenin became more 'soft' on Roland Holst, 'a comrade who stays in a middle-position between Marxists (*De Tribune*, Gorter, Pannekoek) and opportunists' (Lenin and Zinoviev 1970, p. 15). Roland Holst wrote an article on Zimmerwald's significance: 'De internationale socialistische konferentie van Zimmerwald', *De Nieuwe Tijd*, 1915, pp. 591–9. She gave a personal (and relevant) testimony on the conference: see Roland Holst 1935b. In her unpublished 'Memories' on Leon Trotsky (*Persoonlijke herinneringen aan Leo Trotski*, 1940, IISG's archives), she thought that the attitude of Trotsky was far and away more 'positive' than that of Lenin, which was essentially 'destructive'.

Lenin the publication of a Marxist review, with Pannekoek as editor, to replace Kautsky's *Neue Zeit*.<sup>47</sup> Lenin agreed entirely with this proposal. In reality, the efforts within the SDP towards regroupment with other revolutionary groups in Switzerland, before Zimmerwald, were the work of Gorter and Luteraan, who was another member of the SDP leadership and a delegate to the Bern international conference of socialist youth in April 1915, not as an official representative of the SDP, but as a member of the young socialist group *De Zaaier* ('The Sower'), which was independent of the party.<sup>48</sup> This organisation had one hundred members, and published the journal *De Jonge socialist* ('The Young Socialist'). Luteraan immediately made contact with Lenin.<sup>49</sup>

By contrast, the position of Tribune's old leaders – Wijnkoop, Ravesteyn, and Ceton – was very ambiguous. Lenin wanted to work closely with the Dutch in preparing the Zimmerwald Conference. In a letter to Wijnkoop, written during the summer, Lenin wrote forcefully: 'But you and we are independent parties; we must do this: formulate the programme of the revolution, unmask and denounce the stupid and hypocritical slogans of peace'.<sup>50</sup> An urgent telegram was sent to Wijnkoop just before the conference: 'Come straight away!'.<sup>51</sup>

However, the SDP sent no delegates to the conference, which took place over 5–8 September 1915. Wijnkoop and his friends circulated the – unconfirmed – information that at the beginning of the war the conference's organiser, the Swiss MP Robert Grimm, had voted in favour of credits for the mobilisation of the Swiss army. On 25 September, *De Tribune* published the 'Zimmerwald Manifesto' written by Trotsky, but did not inform its readers about the conference-resolutions. Instead of seeing in Zimmerwald 'a step forwards in the practical and ideological break with opportunism and social chauvinism',<sup>52</sup> the SDP leadership – with the exception of Pannekoek, Luteraan and Gorter<sup>53</sup> – saw in

47 Letter from Gorter, cited by Wiessing 1980, p. 34. This letter, like much of Gorter's correspondence, can be found in the former ZPA (Zentrales Partei Archiv) of the Moscow Institute of Marxism-Leninism. Wiessing was able to gain access to them. Some letters from Gorter's correspondence with Lenin have been published: Stuiveling 1967.

48 See Harmsen 1961. The Bern conference was strongly oriented to the left. In its magazine *Jugend Internationale* the Socialist Youth International published articles against the war.

49 See Luteraan's testimony, in an interview by Igor Cornelissen in 1964: 'Lenin vroeg: hoe gaat het met Gorter?' ('Lenin asked me: how is Gorter?'), *Vrij Nederland*, 28 November 1964.

50 Letter written in June or July 1915, in Lenin 1967a, p. 80.

51 Lademacher 1967, p. 103.

52 *De Tribune*, 25 September 1915.

53 Lenin and Zinoviev 1970, p. 10.

it nothing but opportunism. Worse still, they completely missed the historic importance of an event which represented the first organised political reaction to the war, and the first step towards the regroupment of internationalist revolutionaries; they saw nothing but a 'historic farce' in what was to become the living symbol of the struggle against the war; they only saw 'stupidity'<sup>54</sup> in the striking gesture of fraternisation between French and German socialists across the trenches: 'We should obviously thank God (sic) that he has preserved us from the stupidity of the Zimmerwald Conference or, more precisely, from the need to conduct opposition on the spot ... We knew from the start what would come of it: nothing but opportunism and no struggle of principles!'<sup>55</sup>

Strong criticism appeared from within the SDP against this 'sectarian attitude'. A party-leader like Knuttel from Leiden – strongly influenced by Pannekoek – urged the strengthening of the Zimmerwald revolutionary minority led by the Bolsheviks. In response to these criticisms, on 2 October 1915, *De Tribune* published a self-justificatory article by Wijnkoop, who refused any support for the Manifesto, on the grounds that it had no revolutionary perspective: 'The Manifesto uses grand words, but forgets to say that it is only through the massive resistance of each proletariat, in a revolutionary manner, against the war and in its own country, in other words by "local" resistance in every country against the national bourgeoisies, that the new International will be born.' This refusal was justified by the Manifesto's call for the 'right of peoples to self-determination', a formulation which Gorter, Pannekoek, and even Roland Holst all rejected, while still adhering to the Zimmerwald movement. Wijnkoop's supreme argument was, above all, the refusal of any 'spirit of compromise'.<sup>56</sup>

In fact, Wijnkoop refused, out of sectarianism, to envisage any attempt at regroupment with elements of the 'centre', such as Trotsky or Roland Holst, who at Zimmerwald were moving gradually towards the positions of the left. In a letter to Ravesteyn of 29 October, Wijnkoop attacked Radek, Pannekoek, Trotsky and Roland Holst, whom he saw only as 'centrist elements', sparing only Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg. There was, he wrote, no proof that 'Holst-Trotsky' wanted to break with Kautsky. On the contrary, it still had to be said that both were fundamentally bourgeois and nationalist. And he added – although the

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54 It is significant that all the militants on the left of the SDP declared in favour of the Zimmerwald movement. The refusal to commit to an international regroupment of revolutionaries came from the right around Willem van Ravesteyn and Wijnkoop. Sectarianism was the fault of this right wing.

55 Letter from Wijnkoop to Van Ravesteyn, 21 September 1915, cited by De Liagre Böhl 1973, p. 138.

56 Quoted by Wiessing 1980, p. 39.

representatives of the Spartakus group were in the centre at Zimmerwald, not on the left – that he preferred ‘to march with Rosa and Mehring than with Roland Holst and Trotsky’.<sup>57</sup>

This attitude of Wijnkoop’s, a mixture of sectarianism and irresponsibility, was not without its consequences. For one thing, it left a free hand to the Roland Holst current in Zimmerwald, who was left, thanks to the SDP’s non-appearance, as the only representative there of the Dutch revolutionary movement. The RSV was situated in the ‘centrist’ current at Zimmerwald, which could only envisage the possibility of a struggle for peace, and refused to associate itself with the Zimmerwald left, which posed the foundation of a Third International as the basis for the revolutionary struggle. Secondly, a division appeared within the SDP between Zimmerwald’s supporters, such as Gorter and Pannekoek, and the Wijnkoop leadership, which bore the seeds of later splits (see below). Thirdly, in the Zimmerwald movement itself, the SDP gave the impression of inveterate sectarianism, a brush which tarred some of the movement’s most determined supporters, such as Pannekoek.

In *Nashe Slovo*, October 1915, Trotsky attacked the Tribunists, among whom he included Pannekoek. While agreeing that the Manifesto was the fruit of a ‘compromise’, and emphasising the ‘perfectly correct criticisms’ of the Tribunists, he denounced – not without reason – a ‘narrow-minded confidence of town-hall politics’. For him, Pannekoek was similar to Wijnkoop, a mixture of ‘scepticism’ and ‘intransigence’, ‘which are marvellously complementary’. And he concluded unkindly: ‘We find the most pure culture of formal extremism in Holland, a country which is not at war, and which cannot be considered a focus of social revolution: we need only add that the “Tribunists” have never been able to attract more than 500 members.’<sup>58</sup> Trotsky himself used this argument again after 1920 to justify the policy of formation of mass-parties and fusion with the socialist parties.

In the case of Wijnkoop, Van Ravesteyn and Ceton, their sectarianism was only a cover for an opportunist policy, which was to appear in the open from 1916 onwards. The ‘sectarianism’ of which the Communist International accused Gorter, Pannekoek and their supporters in 1920 did not really exist. On the contrary, they worked determinedly for an international regroupment of revolutionaries.

<sup>57</sup> Lademacher 1967, Vol. 2, pp. 226–8.

<sup>58</sup> *Nashe slovo*, ‘Gollandskie ekstremisty’, October 1915, pp. 27–31. In French: Trotsky 1974a, p. 51.

#### 4 The Development of the SDP: Between Revolution and Opportunism

Despite the policy of the SDP leadership, Zimmerwald encountered an immense echo in the working class in the Netherlands, as it did in all the belligerent countries. Indeed it was such that even the SDAP, under the pressure of its own opposition, published the 'Manifesto of the Zimmerwald Conference' in *Het Weekblad*, the Saturday supplement of *Het Volk*, if only all the better to combat it.<sup>59</sup>

Finally, under the pressure of both the workers and the RSV – which it did not want to be alone in donning the colours of revolutionary activity – the SDP reluctantly joined the international socialist commission created at Zimmerwald.<sup>60</sup> This adherence to the Zimmerwald movement came late. In the end, several factors had caused the SDP to change its attitude, and to move closer to the RSV.

In the first place, Roland Holst's RSV had moved considerably closer to the Tribunists. It had even given solid proof of its move to the left. Those members of the RSV who still belonged to the SDAP left it in January 1916: given the attitude of the SDAP, whose congress explicitly condemned the Zimmerwald movement, the small minority hostile to the Second International henceforth turned towards the SDP. Roland Holst immediately made it known that a merger with the Tribunist party was on the agenda.<sup>61</sup> With the exception of the split to the left in February 1917 (see below), this was the last significant split from the SDAP before the formation of the OSP in 1932.

Secondly, and despite the hesitation of its leadership, support for the SDP was growing among the working class. The party's propaganda had developed considerably: against the war, against three-year military service, against unemployment and rationing. It was especially active amongst the unemployed and in the unemployed-committees which began to be formed. Politically, the party's theoretical armoury made it appear as the only consistent Marxist party in the Netherlands. The theoretical monthly *De Nieuwe Tijd* ('The New Epoch'), established in May 1896, which belonged neither to the SDAP nor to the SDP and had comprised 'Marxist theoreticians' from both parties since the 1909 split (Van der Goes and Wibaut remained as editors), now passed entirely into the

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59 See Burger 1983, pp. 42–4.

60 However, the SDP did not take part in either the Kienthal or Stockholm conferences. In the case of Kienthal, the Dutch government refused to issue a passport for the SDP delegate, Roland Holst, who was again chosen by the party.

61 See Burger 1983, pp. 51–3.

hands of the internationalist-Marxist current. The departure of Wibaut and Van der Goes eliminated the 'opportunist and revisionist current' from the pages of *De Nieuwe Tijd*.

It is noteworthy that Roland Holst was associated with Gorter and Pannekoek on the periodical's editorial committee, and it became an organ of the fight for 'socialism, and the liberation of humanity from capitalism'.<sup>62</sup>

Thirdly, in the person of Pannekoek, the SDP was increasingly involved in gathering together those revolutionary forces which took a clear position against the war and for the revolution. From 1915, following a visit to Bremen, Pannekoek collaborated regularly with the German internationalist currents: Borchardt's *Lichtsstrahlen* group in Berlin and *Arbeiterpolitik*, the Bremen group led by Johann Knief, which published its own paper after leaving the SDP in 1916. In constant contact with the German internationalists, it was natural that Pannekoek was made an editor – with help from Roland Holst – of the periodical *Vorbote* ('The Herald'), in January 1916. This periodical, produced in Switzerland, was the organ of the Zimmerwald left, hostile to centrism and the pacifist current in the Zimmerwald conference.<sup>63</sup> In collaboration with Lenin, Radek, and Zinoviev, it stood resolutely on the terrain of 'the future Third International'.

All this expressed a rapid evolution in both the SDP and Roland Holst's group. After a period of hesitation, the 'Tribunist' party had assumed its international responsibilities. Henriëtte Roland Holst, having been with the Zimmerwaldian centre, was now, like Trotsky, moving clearly to the left.

There was no longer any reason for two separate revolutionary groups to exist in the Netherlands. It was time for a regroupment. On 19 February 1916, the SDP leadership proposed a merger with the RSV. On 26 March 1916, the latter's general assembly declared in favour of the merger. However, the sections in Rotterdam and The Hague demonstrated considerable confusion in wanting to accept the regroupment only if it could be joined by certain syndicalists. These hesitations showed that, as with the SDP, the dividing-line between the Marxist and the revolutionary-syndicalist current was far from being clear.

Nonetheless, the merger took place. The SDP gained 200 militants, becoming a 700-strong 'party'. This growth, after a long period of stagnation, at last allowed the party to publish a daily: *De Tribune* henceforth appeared every day. The SDP's growth was also qualitative. For the first time in its history, on 21 June

62 Quoted by Van Ravesteyn 1948, p. 149.

63 There were only two issues. Radek in Switzerland was the *de facto* editor. Pannekoek wrote the editorial for the first issue.

1916 the SDP was able successfully to lead a workers' demonstration in Amsterdam against hunger and the war. The 'sect' was becoming a workers' 'party' – albeit very small – through its ability to exert a certain ideological influence on the action of layers of the proletariat.

It is certain that the development of the Marxist current in the Netherlands, in this year 1916, was the fruit of an awakening of the international proletariat after a year and a half of slaughter on the battlefield. The year 1916 was the watershed that heralded the revolutionary upheaval of 1917 in Russia. The recovery of the class-struggle, after months of torpor, broke up the Sacred Union. In Germany, there began the first big political strikes against the war, following Karl Liebknecht's arrest.

Although neutral, the Netherlands also experienced the same recovery in working-class struggle. The beginning of the international wave of strikes and demonstrations against the effects of the war also found an expression in 'little Holland'. During May and June 1916, working-class women demonstrated spontaneously in Amsterdam against rationing. Committees of proletarian women were formed in Amsterdam and other towns. There was a constant agitation, expressed in meetings and demonstrations.<sup>64</sup> These movements were prolonged by strikes across the whole country in July. These signs of widespread discontent were incontestably pre-revolutionary. The situation in the Netherlands had never been so favourable to a revolutionary-Marxist current.

However, the SDP leadership progressively revealed an ambiguous attitude, and even outright opportunist tendencies. Not on the terrain of social struggle, where the party was very active, but on the political terrain.

First of all, the SDP continued its policy of forming fronts with anarchist and syndicalist organisations. The old cartel of organisations, the SAV (see above), was scuttled on 25 February.<sup>65</sup> It was replaced in April 1916 by a 'Socialist Revolutionary Committee' against the war and its consequences (initials: RSC). The SDP's Wijnkoop and Louis de Visser (both later leaders of the Stalinist Communist Party) were the *de facto* leaders of the new cartel of organisations. Although it was very active in the struggle against the war and poverty, the RSC mainly acted as a general staff substituting itself for the spontaneity of the struggle. In the absence of a revolution, it was not a workers' council; nor was it a strike-committee, which, by its nature, is temporary and closely linked to the extension of the struggle. It was more like a hybrid political organisation, and

64 Burger 1983, pp. 62–75.

65 In fact, the syndicalist currents, represented by the office-workers' and sailors' federations, were afraid of the SDP's growing influence within the SAV.



far from contributing any clarity regarding the objectives of the class-struggle, it appeared very confused in its own aims, as a compromise between different political currents within the workers' movement.

The RSC included anarchist groupings which had already worked with the SDP. The most active of these was undoubtedly the group of Ferdinand Domela Nieuwenhuis.

This group, Social-Anarchist Action (SAC),<sup>66</sup> was, without doubt, revolutionary; though confusedly so, above all thanks to the intransigent personality of Domela Nieuwenhuis. The same could certainly not be said of the other groupings. These included the *Bond van Christen Socialisten* (BvCS, 'Federation of Christian Socialists'), whose politics were pacifist and parliamentary<sup>67</sup> and the *Vrije Menschen Verbond* (VMV, the 'League of Free Men'), inspired by Tolstoy. When Domela Nieuwenhuis's group and the IAMV (see above) left the cartel at the end of 1916, only these little groups were left, soon to be joined in February 1918 by the tiny Socialist Party, a split of 200 militants coming from the SDAP and the NAS. The SP was basically trade-unionist, republican and parliamentary, and led by Harm Kolthek.<sup>68</sup>

This conglomeration of pacifist organisations, most of them completely foreign to revolutionary Marxism, had the immediate effect of dragging the SDP more and more onto the terrain of practical opportunism. By allying itself with the Christian Socialists and the SP, the SDP rapidly fell into the same parliamentary adventurism and unprincipled politics that it had once denounced in Troelstra. In 1917, and as a direct result of the increasingly tense social situation, the Dutch bourgeoisie had introduced a certain form of 'universal' suffrage – which became reality only in 1919, with women's right to vote. The SDP formed an electoral pact with the Christian Socialists and SP. The result was a clear

66 It published *De Vrije Socialist*. There also existed another anarchist group, made up of members of the NAS: the Federation of Revolutionary Socialists (FRS), created in December 1915, which wanted to bring the NAS completely within the libertarian sphere.

67 The BvCS had been formed in July 1907. After 1910 it was led by Bartholomeus (Bart) de Ligt (1883–1938). This theologian was a preacher between 1910 and 1915. In 1915, he was imprisoned for pacifist propaganda. He broke with the Church in 1916, and left the BvCS in 1919. The BvCS survived with difficulty until April 1921. De Ligt remained an anti-militarist. Until 1926, he was the editor – with Albert de Jong – of the anti-militarist periodical *De Wapens neder!*. Biography by Van Egmond in *BWN* 1985. He was a partisan of Gandhi. See Bartolf (ed.) 2000.

68 The SP was built by Harm Kolthek (1872–1946) – pseudonyms: HaKa, Mefisto –, an engineering worker, journalist, editor of *De Wapens neder!*, and secretary of the NAS from 1907 to 1913. He became MP from 1918–22. In 1931 he founded the party *Recht en Vrijheid* which was active among the unemployed in Groningen.

advance over pre-war elections: 17,000 votes in Amsterdam, as against 1,340 in 1913. Certainly, this result expressed the workers' growing disaffection from the SDAP. However, it was also the beginning of a policy which in the space of a year rapidly became parliamentary. This electoralist orientation provoked a clear anti-parliamentary reaction within the SDP, which was at the origins of the anti-electoralist current in the Dutch communist left.

But opposition within the party did not at first crystallise around anti-parliamentarism. It first emerged in 1916, reaching its climax in 1917, against the pro-Allied foreign policy of the Wijnkoop and Ravestejn leadership (Van Ravestejn admitted in his memoirs that he had had contacts with the French secret service during the war). A powerful opposition to this policy formed in the Amsterdam and the Hague sections, under the influence of Barend Luteraan, a member of the party leadership, and Wieuwertsz van Reesema.<sup>69</sup>

In fact, Wijnkoop – following Van Ravestejn – but also, much more seriously, the majority of the SDP, were adopting an orientation favourable to the Entente. This had already appeared indirectly in an article by Van Ravestejn published in *De Tribune* in September 1914. In this piece, he declared that a defeat for Germany would provide the most favourable conditions for sparking revolution in that country. This was not yet a pro-Allied position, nor would he ever openly express one. Moreover, it was hardly a novelty in the Marxist camp – and it happened again during the Second World-War<sup>70</sup> – to try to determine which would be the epicentres of the coming revolutionary earthquake. Pannekoek replied in *De Tribune*,<sup>71</sup> to put an end to this purely theoretical question: even if Germany was more developed than Britain, it was a matter of indifference to Marxists which of the two imperialist camps emerged victorious: the violent oppression in one camp, and the democratic deceit in the other, are both equally disfavoured to the workers' movement. This was exactly the same answer that the Italian and Dutch communist lefts gave in the Second World-War to currents like the Trotskyists and the anarchists.

The discussion went no further. Ravestejn was clearly developing pro-Entente positions. Nonetheless, he remained isolated in the party; Wijnkoop,

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69 Barend Luteraan (1878–1970) was an office-worker, a friend of Gorter, and one of the founders of the KAPN in 1921. He was intensely disliked by Van Ravestejn. Pannekoek had little respect for him, considering him 'dissolute' (see Pannekoek 1982, p. 190). For the biography of Luteraan, see Bos 1996, whose title translates as 'Many a house, but nowhere a home'.

70 The Italian communist left was convinced, like many internationalist groups, that revolution would break out in Germany in 1945.

71 *De Tribune*, 25 November 1914. See De Liagre Böhl 1973, pp. 146–7.

the SDP's president, still had the same position as Gorter and Pannekoek.<sup>72</sup> Everything began to change during 1916. Wijnkoop abruptly adopted Ravesteyn's position, by giving priority to the struggle against German militarism, on the – untrue – grounds that the whole Dutch bourgeoisie had rallied behind Germany.<sup>73</sup> But by 1917, he used the same arguments as those of the 'social-chauvinists' in the Entente countries. In an article approved by the editorial committee of *De Tribune* (which shows that there was a real danger of opportunist gangrene in the SDP) Wijnkoop depicted Germany as the bastion of 'feudal' reaction in Europe, forced to plunder and assassinate the conquered peoples. France, the heir to the great Revolution, and the developed Britain, would be incapable of such acts.<sup>74</sup> Such a position implied that, were Germany to violate Dutch neutrality, then the SDP leadership would call, not for a struggle against both camps, but for support for the Entente.

This position was a turning-point in the party's history, and provoked a storm of protest within it. Led by Barend Luteraan and Van Reesema, an opposition took up the struggle against the editorial committee which had allowed the expression in *De Tribune* of conceptions completely foreign to the party's revolutionary nature. It had been all the easier for the editors to do so, since in 1916 Gorter had withdrawn, ill and depressed, from the committee, and was temporarily incapable of taking part in party-work.<sup>75</sup>

In order to defuse the opposition, the Wijnkoop leadership used a weapon that it was to employ with increasing frequency to discredit its adversaries on the left: slander. It claimed that its opponents, including Gorter and Pannekoek, were in fact pro-German. Ravesteyn was not the last to spread this rumour.<sup>76</sup> In reality, the opposition was using Gorter's analysis, as set out in his 1914 pamphlet on imperialism and officially accepted by the SDP, as the basis for its propaganda. It clearly demonstrated the necessity of combating

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72 Van Ravesteyn admits in his (still-unpublished) autobiography, *De Roman van mijn leven* ('The story of my life') that he adopted a consistently anti-German attitude from the outset. By contrast, he denies this in his book on the development of communism in the Netherlands.

73 *De Tribune*, 29 May 1916.

74 *De Tribune*, 21 May 1917: cited by De Liagre Böhl 1973, p. 150.

75 Gorter had become depressed following the death of his wife Louise Cnoop Koopmans in November 1916. Moreover, his illness weakened him; he was incapable of speaking in workers' meetings. It is also certain that he was entirely taken up with his return to poetry (his great poem *Pan* was published in 1917).

76 He does not hesitate to describe the Luteraan–Gorter opposition as pro-German. See Van Ravesteyn 1948, p. 161.

every camp involved in the war: 'There is no question of fighting particularly against German imperialism. Every imperialism is equally against the proletariat'.<sup>77</sup>

It was a disquieting sign of the party's evolution as a whole that the opposition found itself isolated. It encountered no support, moreover. Gorter still hesitated to enter the struggle at its side; Pannekoek and Roland Holst were more deeply involved in international activity than in the SDP. This was a sign of the organisational weakness that reappeared constantly among these internationally-known Marxist leaders, which would prove to be of substantial consequence in 1917–18.

The situation in 1917, above all the Russian Revolution and its repercussions in the Netherlands, still-further deepened the political divisions within the SDP.

## 5 The SDP in 1917: Its Attitude to the Russian Revolution

The Russian Revolution of 1917 came as no surprise to revolutionaries like Gorter, who were convinced that revolution would inevitably result from the war. In a March 1916 letter to Wijnkoop, Gorter revealed his unshakeable confidence in the world-proletariat's revolutionary activity: 'I expect very large movements after the war'.<sup>78</sup>

And yet the revolutionary events, so keenly awaited, had broken out in the midst of war. The Russian Revolution encountered an enormous echo in the Netherlands, which showed clearly enough that the proletarian revolution was also on the agenda for Western Europe; this was no 'Russian' phenomenon, but an international wave of revolutionary struggle against world-capital. From this point of view, 1917 was decisive for the SDP's evolution, as it was confronted with the first signs of the international revolution that it had predicted so enthusiastically since the beginning of the war.

### 5.1 *The First Signs of the Coming Revolution in the Netherlands*

In 1917, a new period of struggle against the war, hunger, and unemployment began. In February, just as revolution was breaking out in Russia, the workers of Amsterdam demonstrated violently against the shortage of food in the shops,

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77 Article by Van Reesema in *De Tribune*, 21 May 1917. William Carl Siewertsz van Reesema (1876–1949) became a leading Stalinist figure of the CPN in the 1930s, echoing the 'voice' of the Comintern's apparatus.

78 Letter published in *Kontrast*, No. 5, p. 5. It can be found, with much other correspondence between Gorter and Wijnkoop, in the Wijnkoop archives in Moscow.

and against the policy of the city-council, some of whose aldermen were Social-Democrat leaders.<sup>79</sup>

The demonstrations quickly acquired a political colouring; they were directed not only against the government, but also against the Social Democracy. The SDAP had several aldermen on Amsterdam city-council; Florentinus Marinus Wibaut, a member of the SDAP leadership, was even president of the city's supplies-commission, as he had been since 1916. As such, the workers held him responsible for the food-shortage.

However, on 10 February, Wibaut, and Vliegen (another SDAP leader elected to the council), called for the army to 'restore order', after several bakeries had been ransacked. This was the SDAP's first concrete step in committing itself to the side of the bourgeoisie and repressing every working-class reaction. The SDAP's solidarity with the established order appeared more clearly still in July, during a week which has gone down in history as the 'Week of Blood'. Following a women's demonstration against shortages, and the ransacking of several shops, the council, with the full support of all its Social-Democratic aldermen, imposed a complete ban on demonstrations. The workers' reaction was immediate: a 24-hour strike (called by the RSC) was followed by 20,000 Amsterdam workers. The mass-strike spread like wildfire to most of the Netherlands' major cities.<sup>80</sup> However, in both Amsterdam and other towns, the army and police fired on the workers. For the first time since the beginning of the war, workers fell to the bullets of the bourgeoisie's forces.

Vliegen, but above all Wibaut,<sup>81</sup> bore a heavy responsibility for this bloody repression. Wibaut had no hesitation in distinguishing between the demonstrators and unemployed – whom he saw as nothing but 'debauched youth'<sup>82</sup> – and the 'modern workers' movement' organised in the unions and the SDAP. In an article in *Het Volk*, he even justified the repression, which he described as 'limited', and called for 'other methods of maintaining order'. Such language, which the SDAP leadership did not disavow, was that of the ruling class. Even if the SDAP hesitated to support Wibaut officially,<sup>83</sup> Dutch Social Democracy

79 See Burger 1983, pp. 76–96, for an account of these 1917 events.

80 The movement lasted from 2 to 6 July. The mayor and Wibaut banned all workers' demonstrations. *De Tribune* campaigned against both of them. See Burger 1983, p. 86.

81 F.M. Wibaut (1859–1936) joined the SDAP in 1897. He was a member of Amsterdam city-council from 1907 to 1931, and alderman from 1914 to 1931. Vliegen (1862–1947) was one of the SDAP's founders in 1894. See Borrie 1968 and *BWN* 1979.

82 *Het Volk*, 10 July 1917. Quoted by Burger 1983, p. 91.

83 In his *Memoirs (Gedenkschriften)*, published between 1927 and 1931, Troelstra cynically supported Wibaut's repressive policy as party-policy:

initiated a policy which was fully developed in Germany during 1919 by Noske and Scheidemann. On a small scale, Troelstra's party opened the way to collaboration with the bourgeoisie against the revolutionary movement.

The 'Week of Blood' clarified the difference between the revolutionary SDP and the SDAP, which had become a traitor to the working class; the SDP could thus call on the workers to 'separate themselves completely from the traitors to the working class, the modern Judas, the lackeys of capital, the SDAP and NVV leadership'.<sup>84</sup>

These events in the Netherlands unquestionably followed in the wake of the Russian Revolution. The latter encouraged not only strikes and demonstrations by the proletariat, but also agitation in the army. Although limited, October 1917 saw the beginning of the formation of soldiers' councils in several places, and the development of a whole movement against military discipline.<sup>85</sup>

The SDP undoubtedly benefited from the situation. By participating fully in the strikes and demonstrations, and by suffering from the repression with several of its militants in prison,<sup>86</sup> the SDP appeared as a true revolutionary party: not a party of sectarian word-mongering, but an active, militant organisation.<sup>87</sup>

This activity broke clearly with the SDP's ambiguity in its foreign policy towards the Entente and especially towards the Russian Revolution. It was as if the party's own development were pushing it, out of a concern for its newly acquired 'popularity' amongst the workers, to make opportunist concessions in order to strengthen the influence it had won in 1917 on the electoral terrain.

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'A few weeks later, Wibaut wrote an article in *Het Volk* where he described this violence as inevitable, but he insisted strongly on the deplorable fact that a democratic city council should have to intervene in this way against the population. In his article, he expressed an urgent wish that the police professionals should come up with a non-violent means of preventing such looting. In my opinion, one cannot be guided by such sentimentalism, which he gives such a weight in his arguments. If we Social Democrats have conquered such an important position of strength, then it is in the interests of the whole working class, and consequently such a position of strength should be defended by any means, including violent ones if necessary' (Troelstra 1931, pp. 72–3).

84 *De Tribune*, 23 July 1917.

85 These soldiers' councils were called into existence by the RSC.

86 Including Louis de Visser (1878–1945), a future leader of the Stalinist CPN in the 1930s.

87 In 1921, Radek claimed that the Dutch left had never experienced revolutionary movements in their own country. According to him, the Dutch militants' theories 'came from a country where, to date, there have never been any mass-revolutionary movements'. Radek 1921, p. 19.

## 5.2 *The SDP Leadership and the Russian Revolution*

By 1917, the party that Lenin had considered at the beginning of the war – along with the Bolsheviks – to be the most revolutionary and the most capable of working towards the foundation of a new International, was singularly remote from Bolshevism.

This was true, at least, for the majority of the party, whose leadership was completely dominated by the trio of Wijnkoop, Ravesteyn, and Ceton. After Gorter's departure and Luteraan's elimination from the SDP leadership, the minority was isolated. Nonetheless, backed by the moral authority of Pannekoek and Gorter, it conducted the most determined struggle to support Bolshevism and defend the proletarian nature of the Russian Revolution. In fact, this attitude was common to all the lefts which formed as oppositions or fractions in the various socialist parties.

The majority's suspicion of the Bolsheviks was a direct result of their pro-Entente positions in international politics. This first became apparent when the Bolsheviks crossed Germany to return to Russia. This journey was condemned by *De Tribune*, which saw it as a compromise with Germany.<sup>88</sup> In reality, this mistrust was only a figleaf covering an attitude of support for Kerensky's policy, which in July 1917 led to the military offensive against Germany. To justify this support, Van Ravesteyn – writing in *De Tribune*<sup>89</sup> – did not hesitate to compare Kerensky's Russia to the revolutionary France of 1792. Ideologically, the position of Van Ravesteyn and Wijnkoop was identical to that of the Mensheviks: this was a bourgeois revolution, which should be exported by military means, to crush the 'feudal and reactionary' German Empire.

This implicit support for the Kerensky government provoked a violent reaction by the SDP opposition. Through the writings of Pannekoek and Gorter, the latter sided resolutely with the Bolsheviks, denouncing both the Russian bourgeois democracy, and the idea that the Russian revolution could be compared to 1793 in France. For Pannekoek, this was no 'bourgeois' revolution on the march, but a counter-revolutionary and imperialist policy. His standpoint was identical to that of the Bolsheviks in 1917: 'Any war ... conducted together with the bourgeoisie against another state is a weakening of the class-struggle, and consequently a betrayal of the proletarian cause'.<sup>90</sup>

88 This was reported by Gorter 1921a, a pamphlet entitled *Het opportunisme in de Nederlandsche Communistische Partij*. This text, important to understanding the history of the SDP/CPN, is available in French in Authier and Barrot (eds.) 1976, pp. 286–312.

89 *De Tribune*, 14 June 1917, p. 2, col. 2.

90 *De Nieuwe Tijd*, 1917, pp. 444–5.

The SDP leadership went no further down this slippery slope. When the councils' seizure of power became known in November, *De Tribune*, unlike the anarchists, greeted the news with sincere enthusiasm.<sup>91</sup>

However, the minority grouped around Gorter, Pannekoek, and Luteraan, expressed justified doubts as to the leadership's sudden revolutionary enthusiasm. By refusing to take part in the third (and last) conference of the Zimmerwald movement,<sup>92</sup> held in Stockholm in September, it revealed its refusal to commit itself resolutely to the road towards the Third International. A verbal radicalism, used once again to condemn 'opportunism', barely concealed the Wijnkoop leadership's narrowly national policy. Its internationalism was purely verbal, and was, more often than not, determined by the surrounding environment.

It is no surprise that during the debates over Brest-Litovsk, on the question of peace or revolutionary war, the leadership took it upon itself to champion revolutionary war at all costs. In Russia, Bukharin and Uritsky supported the war, thinking that this would accelerate the extension of the proletarian revolution in Europe. For them, there was no ambiguity: the 'revolutionary war' was not a war against Germany, which could fit the plans of the Entente: what mattered was to break the encirclement of revolutionary Russia, to spread the revolution not just to Germany, but to the whole of Europe, including the countries of the Entente.

Against all expectations, Gorter joined the SDP leadership in supporting the position of Radek and Bukharin, for the same reasons as the Russian left-communists. He mounted a strong attack on Pannekoek, who completely supported Lenin's position for a rapid peace with Germany.

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91 *De Tribune*, 12 November 1917. The paper's editorial committee sent a telegram of congratulations to Lenin. The attitude of anarchists like Domela Nieuwenhuis was by contrast lukewarm. In December 1917, Domela Nieuwenhuis wrote in *De Vrije Socialist* that Lenin's new régime was no better than its predecessor. But in November 1918, alongside Wijnkoop, he took part in a demonstration to celebrate the anniversary of the Russian Revolution, jointly organised with the SDP (See: *De Vrije, anarchistisch maandblad*, No. 11–12, 1987, pp. 27–9).

92 Despite opposition from Lenin, who wanted to found the Third International immediately in April 1917, the Bolsheviks sent two delegates – Vaslav Vorovsky (1871–1923) and Dr. Nikolai Semashko (1874–1949) – to the 'Zimmerwaldian' Stockholm Conference of 5 September. This should not be confused with the conference of parties belonging to the Second International, which was supposed to take place in the same city on 15 May. It did not do so, because the French 'social-patriots' refused to sit with German 'social-patriots', and also because the governments refused to give passports to the delegates. See Humbert-Droz 1968, pp. 215–32.



Pannekoek's starting point was the obvious fact that 'Russia can no longer fight'. Revolution could never be exported by military force; its strength lay in the outbreak of class-struggle in other countries: 'force of arms is the proletariat's weak point'.<sup>93</sup>

Gorter was aiming at the wrong target. For several months, he avoided any criticism of the SDP leadership. He saw Pannekoek's position as a version of the same pacifism he had fought in 1915, a negation of the arming of the proletariat. He believed that a revolutionary war should be waged against the German Empire, since 'force of arms is now the proletariat's strong point'.<sup>94</sup>

However, Gorter began to change his position. Since the summer of 1917 he had been in Switzerland, officially for health reasons, but in fact because he wanted to distance himself from the Dutch party, and to work with the Russian and Swiss revolutionaries. Through Platten and Berzin (both 'Zimmerwaldians' who worked with Lenin), he made contact with the Russian revolutionaries. He began a close correspondence with Lenin, and became convinced that Lenin's position on peace with Germany was correct. He also undertook to translate Lenin's theses 'On the unfortunate peace' into Dutch.<sup>95</sup>

Gorter thus freed himself to combat the SDP leadership, alongside Pannekoek, and to unreservedly support the Russian Revolution and Bolshevism.

### 5.3 *The Russian and the Worldwide Revolution*

For two years, the left in the SDP defended the 'proletarian nature of the Russian Revolution'. It was the first stage of the world-revolution. Gorter and the party minority bitterly denounced the Menshevik idea – supported by Ravesteijn – of a 'bourgeois revolution' in Russia. Such a position could only strengthen the position favourable to the Entente and the perpetuation of the imperialist war in the name of 'revolutionary' war. As the Russian Revolution began to degenerate, and the Third International was subjected to the interests of the Russian state, the left began to defend the idea of a 'double' revolution in Russia, first bourgeois, then proletarian (see below) albeit from a different viewpoint to that of Menshevism. For the left, a bourgeois revolution could mean nothing but state-capitalism and counter-revolution. It appeared not at the beginning, but at the end of the revolutionary wave.

93 *De Tribune*, 15 December 1917, p. 1, col. 4.

94 *De Tribune*, 12 January 1918, 'De Maximalisten en de vrede' ('The maximalists and peace'). Curiously, Gorter here calls the Bolsheviks 'maximalists'.

95 *De Nieuwe Tijd*, July 1918, pp. 326–34, with an introduction by Gorter.

In 1917 and 1918, Gorter and the minority were Bolshevism's strongest supporters. They introduced and spread Lenin's ideas. During 1918, it was Gorter who undertook, off his own bat, to translate Lenin's *State and Revolution*. Naively, he spread a veritable Lenin personality cult. In his pamphlet on *The World Revolution*, the future denouncer of 'leaders' recognised Lenin as the leader of the revolution: 'He is the leader of the Russian Revolution. May he become the leader of the world-revolution!'<sup>96</sup>

Gorter's pamphlet, which was not an official SDP publication, is one of his most important political and theoretical works. It has the advantage of drawing a certain number of lessons from the Russian Revolution, from the standpoint of its organisation. Like Lenin, Gorter declared the councils as the finally-discovered form of the revolutionary power, a form that was valid not just for Russia, but throughout the world: 'The organisation and the centralisation, the form and the expression of the proletarian revolution, the foundation of the socialist society, are here'.<sup>97</sup>

The localist and federalist conception of the workers' councils, which was later developed by the Unionist current around Rühle, is completely absent from the Dutch left, as is the idea of a federation of proletarian states based on national workers' councils, which was an idea developed later in Zinoviev's Communist International. The form of the world-proletarian power would be 'in the not distant future the new International, the great workers' council of all the nations of the earth'.<sup>98</sup>

The proletarian revolution can only flourish in the main industrialised countries, not just in one country. It must be simultaneous: '[Socialism] must be established in several countries – in the main countries, at least – at the same time'.<sup>99</sup> Gorter was to repeat over and over again the idea that Western Europe is the epicentre of the real workers' revolution, given the proletariat's numerical and historical weight in relation to the peasantry: 'The necessity and the

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96 Gorter 1918. An English translation was published in 1920 by the Socialist Information and Research Bureau (Glasgow). Gorter idolises Lenin the individual, whom he no longer sees as an expression of the party:

'I am convinced that he surpasses all other leaders of the proletariat, and that he alone deserves to be placed side by side with Marx. If Marx surpasses him in theoretical knowledge and dialectic acuteness, he towers above Marx by his deeds ... And we are drawn towards him as we are drawn towards Marx. And the mind and the soul of the man inspire us with affection' (Gorter 1918, p. 60).

97 Gorter 1918, p. 59.

98 Gorter 1918, p. 76.

99 Gorter 1918, p. 64.

possibility of the revolution in Western Europe – which is a condition of the world-revolution – can be clearly seen. Here, there is a proletariat strong in its organisation and great in its numbers.<sup>100</sup>

The revolution would be longer and more difficult than in Russia, faced with a much better-armed bourgeoisie; moreover, ‘The proletariat of Western Europe stands before its task alone’.<sup>101</sup> Contrary to the Comintern’s later accusations against the communist left, there is no sign here of ‘infantile’ impatience.

It is remarkable that the only, indirect, criticism of the Bolsheviks contained in *The World Revolution* should be directed against the slogan of ‘the right of peoples to self-determination’. According to Gorter, this position does not come up to those of Pannekoek and Luxemburg, who refused the framework of the nation, for whom ‘Self-determination can only follow and not precede socialism’.<sup>102</sup> It is true that elsewhere Gorter – who was in favour of the independence of the Dutch East Indies, and, therefore, supported the slogans of the SDP in this respect – makes an explicit distinction between the West, where revolution is on the agenda, and the East, where independence should be demanded for the colonies and semi-colonies: ‘In dealing with this right, we must distinguish between Western and Eastern Europe, between the Asiatic states and the colonies’.<sup>103</sup>

Lenin was quite right to emphasise the incoherence of Gorter’s position, which looked less like a divergence of principle, and more a question of tactics, to be examined according to geo-historical zones.<sup>104</sup>

At all events, this pamphlet had a considerable echo in the Netherlands, as well as in the many other countries where it was immediately translated.

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100 Gorter 1918, p. 45.

101 Gorter 1918, p. 67.

102 Gorter 1918, p. 24. But Gorter adds: ‘this sort of independence can be even worse for a nation than subjection’. This position was thus far removed from that of the Tribunist leaders, who like Rutgers and Sneevliet supported ‘national- and colonial-liberation struggles’.

103 Gorter 1918.

104 ‘Gorter is against the self-determination of *his* own country but *in favour* of self-determination for the Dutch East Indies, oppressed as they are by “his” nation!’. See Lenin, ‘The Discussion on Self-Determination summed up’, *Sbornik Sotsial-Demokrata*, No. 1, October 1916.

## 6 1918: Between Revolution and Opportunism. The Birth of the Dutch Communist Party

The year 1918 was a decisive one for the Dutch revolutionary movement. The SDP minority, made up of different fractions, became a structured opposition to the opportunism of the Van Ravesteijn-Wijnkoop leadership. This opposition grew in numbers along with the SDP, which in November declared itself a Communist Party, just as revolution was knocking at the door.

### 6.1 *The Minority's Offensive inside the SDP: Fraction and Opposition*

In the spring of 1918, the SDP underwent an unprecedented internal crisis. Wijnkoop's authoritarian leadership directly threatened to crush the minority. He had the section in The Hague – one of the opposition's most active – suspended: an unprecedented event in the SDP's history. This suspension came after several exclusions of individual militants of the opposition.<sup>105</sup> These measures, in contradiction with workers' democracy, showed up the leadership as worthy imitators of Troelstra.

The opposition wasted no time in regrouping, via a joint meeting held on 26 May 1918. It brought together groups whose reactions to opportunism within the SDP had until then remained dispersed:

- the Zimmerwald-Left Propaganda-Union, from Amsterdam. Led by Van Reesema, who was working for the party to link up with the Bolshevik left;
- Luteraan's group in Amsterdam, in close contact with Gorter;
- the Rotterdam group;
- the Hague section.

The opposition represented about a third of the party's militants. From June onwards, it had its own fortnightly paper, *De Internationale*. An editorial commission was formed. The press-commission, which met every three months and included representatives from each of the four groups, in practice became an executive body.<sup>106</sup> This opposition was virtually a fraction within the SDP, with its own paper and commission. However, it lacked its own clearly estab-

105 See *De Internationale*, No. 9, 12 October 1918: 'Verweer van afdeeling den Haag der SDP' ('Defence of the SDP's Hague section').

106 *De Internationale*, No. 1, 15 June 1918, 'Ons Orgaan', p. 1. The regroupment's main lines were: political attachment to the Zimmerwald left; struggle against the imperialist Dutch state; the sharpest struggle against all reformist and imperialist tendencies amongst union-members organised in the NAS and the NVV (the SDAP union).

lished platform, for lack of homogeneity. It also suffered badly from the absence of Gorter, who only contributed to the debate from Switzerland through his articles, whose publication was, moreover, subject to the bad faith of *De Tribune*'s editorial staff, controlled by Wijnkoop and Van Ravesteyn.<sup>107</sup>

The reason behind this regroupment of the oppositions was their growing hostility towards party-policy, increasingly oriented towards the elections. The 3 July elections had been a real success for the SDP. For the first time, it had seats in parliament: Wijnkoop and Van Ravesteyn had become deputies. This had been made possible by an alliance with the tiny Socialist Party (SP), which had left the SDAP in 1917. Led by a leader of the NAS, Harm Kolthek,<sup>108</sup> the SP was openly pro-Entente. With the Social-Christians, the other component of this electoral 'united front', it won a seat in parliament.

The opposition denounced this alliance as a 'monstrous union' with pro-Entente trade-union elements, and pointed out that the electoral success was purely demagogic. The votes gleaned from the trade-unionists of the NAS had been won by a campaign which seemed to support the policy of the USA. The United States were holding the Dutch merchant-fleet in American ports, as to use them in the war against Germany, in exchange for food-supplies for the Netherlands; Wijnkoop declared that all means available should be used to get these supplies from the USA. This policy was denounced vigorously by Gorter and the Bussum section, but only later, in November.<sup>109</sup> Like Gorter, the opposition increasingly looked on Wijnkoop as another Troelstra, whose love for the Russian Revolution was 'purely platonic', and whose politics were purely parliamentarian.<sup>110</sup>

The approaching end of the war, accompanied by revolutionary upheavals, pushed the opposition's struggle against Wijnkoop's pro-Entente policy. More and more, it emphasised the danger of a parliamentary policy.<sup>111</sup> It also force-

107 Since August 1917, Wijnkoop and Van Ravesteyn had, in fact, been the daily's only editors.

108 Kolthek, who was elected as a deputy, wrote for a liberal paper *De Telegraaf*, which was more vigorously pro-Entente. With the SP and the BvSC, the SDP won 50,000 votes – of which 14,000 were for Wijnkoop in Amsterdam – in other words half the SDAP's tally. The three elected deputies formed a 'revolutionary parliamentary fraction'.

109 See De Liagre Böhl 1973, p. 213.

110 Gorter wrote an article identifying Wijnkoop with Troelstra, published under the headline 'Troelstra–Wijnkoop', in *De Tribune* of 18 September 1918. *De Tribune* of 26 October 1918 declared: 'The directing committee's love for the Russian Revolution is purely platonic. In reality, the greatest powers of its love are directed towards the extension of the party's popularity and numbers with the help of allies in Parliament'.

111 The opposition did not yet reject parliamentarism as such: it sought a serious discus-

fully combated the revolutionary syndicalism of the NAS, which had begun to work with the reformist NVV, the union controlled by Troelstra's party. We can see, here, the seed of the anti-parliamentarian and anti-union politics of the future Dutch communist left. This meant a break with the old 'Tribunism'.

## 6.2 *The Abortive Revolution of November 1918*

The revolutionary events of November were a test of fire for a party expanding numerically, but threatening to break up.

Events in Germany, where the government fell at the end of October, created a real revolutionary atmosphere in the Netherlands. Mutinies broke out in army-camps on 25 and 26 October 1918. They followed a constant workers' agitation against food-shortages, during the months of September and October, in Amsterdam and Rotterdam.

It was symptomatic that Troelstra's official Social Democracy began to radicalise. The other SDAP chiefs were astonished to hear the party-leader give impassioned speeches in favour of revolution and the seizure of power by the working class. To the stupefaction of the Dutch bourgeoisie, whose government was that newly formed by the Catholic Ruijs de Beerenbrouck (1873–1936), Troelstra proclaimed himself their irreconcilable enemy:

Don't you feel, little-by-little, with events, that you are sitting on a volcano ... The epoch of the bourgeois governmental system is over. Now the working class, the new rising force, asks you to give way to it ... We are not your friends, we are your enemies, we are, so to speak, (sic) your most resolute enemies.<sup>112</sup>

Had Troelstra become an eleventh-hour 'revolutionary'? In fact, he was speaking double talk. Behind the closed doors of a meeting of the SDAP leadership

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sion within the workers' movement to determine future tactics: '... important problems in this phase of the workers' movement could not be clarified ... On the subject of parliamentarism, the editorial commission takes the view that everyone should be able to give his opinion in *De Internationale*. However, this question is not yet exhausted ... The same is true for participation or not in elections' (*De Internationale*, No. 9, 12 October 1918, 'Landelijke conferentie van De Internationale'). Pannekoek (in *De Nieuwe Tijd* February 1915, 'De Sociaaldemokratie en de oorlog', pp. 137–51) had already condemned parliamentarism, which had become 'non-revolutionary', but he did not exclude the possibility of 'a principled struggle well fought in Parliament' still having 'a revolutionary value'.

112 Quoted by De Wolff 1978, p. 158.

on 2 November, only three days after his impassioned outburst in Parliament, Troelstra baldly admitted that his tactic was to forestall action by the revolutionaries, encouraged by the revolution in Germany: 'In these circumstances, contradictions amongst the working class will be aggravated, and a growing number of workers will place themselves under the leadership of irresponsible elements'.<sup>113</sup>

Troelstra considered revolution to be inevitable, and proposed to neutralise an eventual 'Dutch Spartakism' by adopting the same tactics as the German Social Democracy in the workers' councils: take over the leadership in order to destroy them: 'We are not now calling for the revolution, but the revolution calls us ... What has happened in those countries that are undergoing the trial of revolution makes me say: as soon as it comes to that, we must take the leadership'.<sup>114</sup>

The tactic adopted was to call for the formation of workers' and soldiers' councils on 10 November, should the German example spread to the Netherlands. 'Wijnkoop must not be the first' declared Oudegeest, one of the SDAP's leaders.

But on 10 November, the SDP was the first to call for the formation of soldiers' councils, and for strikes. It declared for the arming of the workers, and the formation of a popular government on the basis of the councils. It also demanded the 'immediate demobilisation' of conscripts, which was an ambiguous slogan, since it meant disarming the soldiers, and, therefore, the workers to whom the soldiers might 'give' their weapons.

This slogan was taken up by the SDAP, with precisely that aim in mind. It added the programme of the German Social Democracy, to defuse the revolutionaries' demands: socialisation of industry, complete unemployment-insurance, and the eight-hour day.

But events were to show that the situation in the Netherlands was far from ripe for revolution. On 13 November there was, indeed, a beginning of fraternisation between workers and soldiers in Amsterdam; but the following day, the demonstration clashed with hussars, who fired on the crowd, killing several. The strike called by the SDP for the following day, in protest against the repression, passed unheeded by the Amsterdam workers. The revolution was thoroughly crushed before having been able to develop fully. The call for the formation of councils only had a limited success: only a few groups of soldiers formed councils, in areas cut off from the capital, in Alkmaar and Fries-

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113 Quoted by Burger 1983, p. 114.

114 See Troelstra 1931, p. 245.

land. These councils had no future. The Dutch government acted skilfully: on 13 November it demobilised the soldiers and increased the food-rations of the population.

Thus ended the 'week of the dupes' (*de week der dupes*), to use the expression of the caustic Marxist Pieter Wiedijk (Saks).

While the situation was not yet ripe for revolution, it must be said that the action of the SDAP was decisive in preventing any strike-movement in November. More than twenty years later, Vliegen, a leader of the SDAP, confessed baldly: 'The revolutionaries were not wrong to accuse the SDAP of strangling the strike-movement in 1918, for the Social Democracy quite consciously held it back'.<sup>115</sup>

But, while the SDAP's policy aimed at preventing revolution, that of the syndicalists in the NAS and the RSC – to which the SDP also belonged – helped to create confusion in the ranks of the working masses. During the November events, the NAS moved towards the SDAP and the NVV, with the aim of establishing a common programme. This forerunner of the 'united-front' policy, vigorously criticised in the RSC's meetings, gave the impression that the RSC – to which the NAS belonged – and the SDAP were on the same terrain. The policy of sabotaging the strike-movement was not laid bare. Moreover, the SDP failed to make a real critique of revolutionary syndicalism; during its Leiden Congress of 16–17 November, it considered that 'the NAS acted correctly' during the revolutionary week of 11–16 September.<sup>116</sup>

### 6.3 *The Formation of the Dutch Communist Party (CPH/CPN)*

The same Leiden Congress saw the birth of the Dutch Communist Party. The SDP was the second socialist party, after the Russians, to abandon the 'Social-Democratic' label.<sup>117</sup> The Dutch CP was formed even before the German.

<sup>115</sup> Vliegen 1938, pp. 416–57. Together with Schaper, Vliegen led the most 'anti-revolutionary' tendency inside the SDAP in 1918–20.

<sup>116</sup> *De Tribune*, 18 November, quoted in Burger 1983, p. 123.

<sup>117</sup> The new party's official name was Communist Party of Holland, or CPH. Historians call it the CP Holland, or the CP Nederland (CPN) interchangeably. However, the change of name from CPH to CPN came late. It was decided at the congress of Christmas 1935, to 'sharpen the [party's] struggle for national independence'. This change in name, in the middle of the 'anti-fascist front', was thus made with a nationalist aim. The name of the old paper *De Tribune* changed for that of *Volksdagblad* ('People's Daily'). With a new name, the CPN tried to appropriate the old 'national' heritage (Spinoza, Rembrandt, Van Gogh ...). And with this national background, the party climbed up to 11,000 militants, a third of them in Amsterdam. In 1938 (*Het Volksdagblad*, 14 April), the CPN claimed 'the Communists



The CPH was a small party, but grew fast: its thousand-strong membership at its first congress doubled within the space of a year.

This transformation did not put an end to Wijnkoop's manoeuvring and authoritarian politics. Three weeks before the congress, he and Ceton placed a notice in *De Tribune*, self-proclaiming themselves respectively president and secretary of the party. By anticipating the result of the congress, they gave a curious example of democracy.<sup>118</sup>

Nonetheless, the new party remained the only revolutionary pole of attraction in the Netherlands. This explains why the opposition disintegrated after the founding congress. *De Internationale*, the opposition-press, ceased publication in January 1919. The resignation of the 26 members of the Hague section who refused to join the CPH seemed irresponsible. Their creation of a group of 'international communists', with the aim of joining the Bolsheviks and the Spartakists on the basis of anti-parliamentarism and solidarity with the Russian Revolution, was still-born.<sup>119</sup> Most of its members rejoined the CPH soon afterwards. The Zimmerwald-left group within the party soon dissolved itself. There only remained the 'Gorterist' opposition in Amsterdam, around Bar-

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(were) the best nationalists'. See *Cahiers over de geschiedenis van de Communistische Partij van Nederland*, No. 5, August 1980: 'De communistische pers tussen twee wereldoorlogen', p. 58. This journal of the Dutch CP's history was published by IPSO, an institute for the history of Dutch Communism, from 1968 to 1991.

In 1990, the CPN fused in Parliament with the Greens, the Pacifist Socialist Party, the EVC, the Radical Party (PPR), to form – on 24 November – the *Groen Links*. On 15 June 1991, the CP self-dissolved; it gave its archives to the IISG. A new CPN (NCPN), 'Marxist-Leninist party', or 'pure-communist' organisation, was created in November 1992, publishing the periodical *Manifest*. It came partly from the VCN, the so-called *Horizontalen*, which seceded in 1985, opposing the Eurocommunists, to support the USSR. The NCPN still defends the remaining 'socialist'-Stalinist countries like Cuba, North Korea, and even Serbia.

In July 1999, a split-organisation was founded: the United Communist Party (*Verenigde communistische partij* – VCP), a 'Leninist' organisation, demanding 'internal party-democracy'.

118 *De Tribune*, 26 October 1918. Quoted by Wiessing 1980, p. 86. The wording of the notice was as follows: 'Attention! Given that Wijnkoop is the only candidate for the post of party-president, he is declared elected to that post. Given that the only candidate for the post of party-secretary is Ceton, he is consequently declared elected. The candidates for the post of vice-president are A. Lisser and B. Luteraan'. Luteraan, a long-time member of the opposition, was not elected. Alexander Lisser (1875–1943), a diamond-worker, ultimately became a CPN representative in Moscow in the 1920s.

119 *De Internationale*, No. 14, 18 January 1919, *Collectief uittreden*. This was the last issue. The 'international communists' disappeared as quickly as they had emerged.

end Luteraan. This group maintained continuity with the old opposition, by publishing its own organ from the summer of 1919: *De Roode Vaan* ('The Red Flag').

Gorter was not one of the founders of the Dutch Communist Party. He was absent from the congress. In Switzerland, where he was in contact with the Bolshevik Berzin, he had become increasingly separated from the Dutch movement, instead devoting himself entirely to the international communist movement. Once the government had expelled the Russian Bolsheviks from Switzerland, Gorter left the country, in November 1918. The revolution was beginning in Germany. Until 4 December he remained in Berlin, where he made contact with the Spartakist leaders, Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht.<sup>120</sup> Then he returned to the Netherlands, to join the struggle against the Wijnkoop leadership. But despite Luteraan's urging, he refused to take the lead of the opposition in the CPH. To lead the opposition would be 'as good as impossible' for him, due to his declining health.

This was not a refusal of all political activity. Although a few months later, he gave up all activity in the CPH, he did give his all to work in and for the German communist movement. He became, in practice, one of the leaders and main theoreticians of the opposition which was later to form the KAPD in April 1920. His activity was wholly focused on the Comintern, in the opposition.

Unlike Gorter, Pannekoek took a much greater role in political work within the CPH. In *De Nieuwe Tijd*, bi-monthly since 1919, he tirelessly publicised and defended the positions of the KAPD. He remained in the CPH opposition, but without playing a large part at an organisational level, until December 1921, and resigned from the party. Pannekoek's influence was not felt in the CPH, largely because he was never present at its congresses.

Tribunism's theoretical leaders thus detached themselves from the CPH. They formed the Dutch school of Marxism, whose destiny was, henceforth, tied theoretically and organisationally to that of the German KAPD, until the beginning of the 1930s. Closely tied to the Dutch school of Marxism, the KAPD

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120 Gorter could not have taken part in the fighting in Berlin during January 1919, as H.M. Bock writes in his study 'Zur Geschichte und Theorie der Holländischen Marxistischen Schule', in Gorter and Pannekoek 1969, pp. 26–7. Gorter stayed with his mother in Berlin for a month, and returned to the Netherlands on 4 December. See De Liagre Böhl 1996 p. 210. The discussions with Luxemburg and Liebknecht – and perhaps with Karl Schröder, a future leader of the KAPD – are attested to by Pannekoek 1982 p. 191, and by Doorenbos 1964, p. 41. Jenne Clinge Doorenbos (1886–1973) was Gorter's friend and poetic muse from 1907 onwards. Gorter returned to the Netherlands to prepare the publication of his pamphlet *De Wereldrevolutie* (Gorter 1918).

was to become the centre of international left-communism, on the practical terrain of revolution and organisation. As for the CPH, its history was more and more that of an 'orthodox' section of the Comintern.



**PART 2**

*The Dutch Communist Left and  
the World-Revolution (1919–27)*

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## The Dutch Left in the Comintern (1919–20)

In January 1919 a letter was sent to the various recently formed communist parties, and to the revolutionary fractions or oppositions within the old Social-Democratic parties, inviting them to a congress of the ‘new revolutionary International’. The original idea was just to call an ‘internationalist socialist conference’, to lay the basis for the Third International rather than to convoke a congress. The conference was to have been held before 1 February, either in Berlin or in the Netherlands, and it was to have been clandestine.<sup>1</sup> The plan had to be changed because of the crushing of the January insurrection in Berlin, and the conference was finally held in Moscow from 2–6 March 1919. The Dutch Communist Party received an invitation. It had already decided at its congress in November 1918 to send a delegate once the convocation of the congress of the Third International was definite.<sup>2</sup> However the attitude of the CPN leadership was exactly the same as it had been at the three conferences of the Zimmerwald movement. Although he had been given all that was necessary to make the journey to Moscow, Wijnkoop did not ‘manage’ to start out. This was, in fact, a refusal on his part. To explain his refusal, always camouflaged behind some sectarian remark or other, he had published articles by the British journalist Arthur Ransome, who made out that the congress of the Third International was no more than a ‘purely Slav undertaking’.<sup>3</sup>

In the end, the Dutch Communist Party was represented indirectly and only with a consultative vote at the First Congress of the new International. Its representative, Rutgers, did not come directly from the Netherlands; he had left the country in 1914 to go to the United States where he became a member of the American League for Socialist Propaganda.<sup>4</sup> Arriving in Moscow via Japan,

1 See the editor's introduction, pp. 27–38, of Broué (ed.) 1974, a complete set of texts; in English, Degras (ed.) 1971; see also Broué 1997 and Adibekov, Shakhnazarova and Shiriniya 1997.

2 Wiessing 1980, p. 44.

3 Ransome 1992, quoted in *De Tribune* in September 1919 by Wijnkoop. Arthur Ransome (1884–1967) was a journalist in Russia when the Revolution broke out in 1917. He spoke perfect Russian and became a close friend with many of the Bolshevik leaders. He is the well-known author of *Swallows and Amazons* and a score of children's stories.

4 The American League for Socialist Propaganda was formed in Massachusetts in 1916, inside the Socialist Party and against the party-leadership's line on elections. It published *The*

he in fact represented only this American group and had no mandate. It was thanks to him that the Dutch left was known in the USA. His friend Fraina,<sup>5</sup> one of the leaders of American left-communism, was strongly influenced by Gorter and Pannekoek. The Dutch Communist Party ended up joining the Third International in April 1919. Rutgers was associated with the work of the Executive Committee.

## 1 The Left-Currents in the Comintern (Communist International) in 1919

The left developed in the Third International during 1919 because of the influence of the German Revolution. For all the left-currents this represented the beginning of the proletarian movement in industrialised Western Europe. In spite of the defeat suffered in Berlin in January 1919, when the proletariat was crushed by the Social-Democratic government of Noske and Scheidemann, the world-revolution had never seemed so close. A Soviet Republic had been established in Hungary as well as Bavaria. The situation in Austria remained revolutionary. Large mass-strikes were shaking Britain and were breaking out in Italy. Even the American continent was shaken by the revolutionary wave from Seattle to Buenos Aires.<sup>6</sup> The proletariat in the most developed countries

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*Internationalist* which opposed the majority's orientation towards pacifism in 1917. In 1919 it began calling itself 'the left wing of the Socialist Party' and in Boston published, under the direction of Fraina, the weekly *Revolutionary Age*. In its theses in 1919 it declared itself in favour of leaving the Second International and joining the Third International, in order to eliminate the reformist demands contained in the platform of the SP.

- 5 Louis Fraina (1894–1953) was born in the south of Italy and migrated to the USA with his parents at the age of two. At the age of 15 he became a member of the DeLeonist SLP, which he left in 1914. He became a member of the American SP and, with John Reed, was active in its left wing, which decided to split at a conference in June 1919. This split gave rise to both Reed's Communist Labour Party and Fraina's Communist Party of America – which was the most developed theoretically – in September 1919. After the Amsterdam conference in February 1920, he took part in the Second Congress of the Comintern after he had been cleared of the suspicion that he was an *agent provocateur*. From 1920–21, under the pseudonym 'Luis Corey', he became the head of the Pan-American Bureau of the Comintern in Mexico, with Katayama and the American Charles Philipps. In 1922, he ceased militant-activity and became well-known as a journalist, using the same pseudonym. He became a university-professor in economics, after which he was known mainly for his works on economics. See Buhle 2001.
- 6 The IWW led the Seattle strike which spread to Vancouver and Winnipeg, in Canada. In the same year, 1919, powerful strikes broke out among the metalworkers of Pennsylvania. These



was on the move. Revolutionaries thought that the seizure of power would take place in the near future, so it was necessary to examine what tactics should be adopted in the central capitalist countries where the revolution would be more purely proletarian than in Russia.

The revolutionary wave – in other words, the experience of the workers themselves when confronted with the state – demanded a change in tactics, because it marked the end of the peaceful period of capitalism's growth. All the revolutionary currents recognised the validity of the theses of the First Congress of the Third International:

1. The present period is one of the decomposition and collapse of the whole capitalist system internationally and it will mean the collapse of European civilisation in general if capitalism, with its insoluble contradictions, is not overthrown.
2. The task of the proletariat now is to seize state-power. Taking state-power means destroying the bourgeois state-apparatus and organising a new apparatus of proletarian power.<sup>7</sup>

In the new period, it was the practice of the workers themselves that called into question the old parliamentary and trade-unionist tactics. The Russian proletariat dissolved the Constituent Assembly after it had taken power, while in Germany a significant mass of workers pronounced in favour of boycotting the elections in December 1918. In Russia and Germany, the council-form appeared as the only form for the revolutionary struggle, replacing the union-structure. But the class-struggle in Germany had also revealed an antagonism between the proletariat and the unions. Since the unions had participated in the bloody repression of January 1919, and political organs of struggle had emerged – the Unions (AAU) – the slogan was not to re-conquer the old unions, but to destroy them.<sup>8</sup>

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strikes were fought by the unions and harshly repressed by the police of the bosses and the federal government. In Argentina, dozens of workers were killed during the 'bloody week' in Buenos Aires. At the extreme south of the continent, the agricultural workers of Patagonia were savagely repressed. For the USA, see Brecher 1975, pp. 95–129.

7 Letter of invitation to the congress, in Broué 1974, p. 40.

8 The first union (AAU) that was not anarcho-syndicalist – as they were in the Ruhr – appeared in Bremen in autumn 1919. Its publication *Kampfzruf, Flugzeitung für die revolutionäre Betriebsorganisation* stated clearly that it did not want to 'become a new union'. The AAU of Bremen declared itself 'in favour of the seizure of political power' and denounced the syndicalists as 'enemies of the political dictatorship of the proletariat' (*Kampfzruf*, No. 1, 15 October

By founding the Comintern on the programmes of both the German CP and the Bolsheviks, the new International in fact accepted the anti-parliamentary and anti-union left-currents. Had the congress of the *Spartakusbund* not rejected participation in elections? Even though Rosa Luxemburg disagreed with the majority on this point, she defended an anti-unionist line: '... [the unions] are no longer workers' organisations; they are the most solid defenders of the state and bourgeois society. Consequently it follows that the struggle for socialisation must entail the struggle to destroy the unions. We are all agreed on this point.'<sup>9</sup>

At the beginning the Comintern allowed within its ranks revolutionary-syndicalist militants, such as the IWW, who rejected parliamentarism as well as the activity of the old unions. But these currents rejected political activity in principle, and thus also the need for a political party of the proletariat. This was not true of the militants of the communist left, who, moreover, were usually hostile to the revolutionary-syndicalist current and opposed the latter's admission into the International.<sup>10</sup>

It was during 1919 that a communist current of the left, with a political, rather than a trade-unionist basis, was really formed in the developed countries. The electoral question was the key issue for the left in some countries. In March 1918, the Polish Communist Party – which was the descendant of the SDKPiL of Rosa Luxemburg and Leo Jogisches – boycotted the elections. In Italy, the *Naples II Soviet* appeared on 22 December 1918, edited by Amadeo Bordiga. In contrast with Gramsci and his syndicalist current, which defended participation in elections, Bordiga's current defended communist abstentionism with a view to eliminating the reformists in the Italian Socialist Party (PSI) and in order to form a 'pure communist party'.<sup>11</sup> The abstentionist-communist fraction of

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1919, 'Was ist die AAU?'). The doctoral thesis of Hans Bötcher, written in 1919–21, gives impressive information on the birth of the German *Unionen* and also on the American IWW. See Bötcher 1922.

9 Quoted by Prudhommeaux 1967, p. 55.

10 Bordiga was a very strong partisan of this separation between the political International and the International of economic organisations. Only in 1920 did the Comintern accept within its ranks not only communist parties but also national and regional unions, based on job-description and industry. This lasted until the Red Union International (Profintern) was set up. The KAPD wanted to establish an international of workplace-organisations alongside the Communist International: these were to have a political basis of anti-parliamentarism, destruction of the counter-revolutionary unions, workers' councils and destruction of the capitalist state.

11 Letter of the abstentionist fraction of the PSI to the Moscow Committee of the Third International, 10 November 1919, in *Invariance*, No. 7, 1969.

the PSI was formally constituted in October 1919. In Britain, Sylvia Pankhurst's Workers' Socialist Federation declared itself against 'revolutionary' parliamentarism in order to avoid 'wasting energy'.<sup>12</sup> In Belgium, the *De Internationale* group of Flanders and War van Overstraeten's group were against electoralism.<sup>13</sup> The situation was the same in the more 'peripheral' countries. At the congress of the Bulgarian Communist Party in May 1919, a strong minority distinguished itself in condemning parliamentary action in principle.<sup>14</sup>

12 Pankhurst, 'Communist thought and action in the III International', published in Bordiga's *Il Soviet*, Naples 20 September 1919.

13 War van Overstraeten (1891–1981), painter. Initially an anarchist, during the war he became the editor of the newspaper of the *Jeunes gardes socialistes*; the Zimmerwaldian *Le Socialisme*. He was involved in the formation of the Communist Group of Brussels in 1919, which was to publish *L'Ouvrier communiste* (*De Kommunistische Arbeider* in Flemish) on 1 March 1920. At the Second Congress of the Comintern he supported Bordiga's anti-parliamentarian theses. He was one of the main founders of the Belgian CP in November 1920, to which the Flemish Federation adhered in December (*De Internationale*). At the Third Congress of the Comintern, his positions were very close to those of the KAPD. The Comintern pressured him into accepting the 'centrist' group *Les Amis de l'Exploité* of Joseph Jacquemotte (1883–1936) and Charles Massart (1877–1964) at the unification-congress in September 1921 (for the 1921 congress, see *Documents sur la fondation du parti communiste de Belgique*, reprinted in *Cahiers marxistes*, Brussels, 1971). Unlike Bordiga, he continued to defend anti-parliamentary positions. He was hostile to 'mass'-parties and to 'Bolshevisation', and in 1927 took part in the *Groupe unifié de l'Opposition*. He was excluded with the Opposition in 1929 and became close to Hennaut's *Ligue des communistes internationalistes* (LCI), which was founded in 1931 after its separation with the Trotskyist wing. In Spain from 1931 to 1935, he was in contact with the groups of the communist left. He subsequently withdrew from all political involvement.

14 A strong opposition within the Bulgarian CP was formed in 1919 around Ivan Ganchev, editor of *Rabotnitcheski Vestnik*, Pavel Deliradev, Nikolai Kharlakov (1874–1927) – an old leader of a dissident-group splitting from the *Tesnyaki* in 1905, which had rejoined the party – and Ivan Kolinkoev. Ivan Ganchev, a brilliant intellectual and journalist, took on the task of translating a number of Gorter's works into Bulgarian.

In Hungary, anti-parliamentary positions were known because of a group of Hungarian communists exiled to Vienna following the end of the 'Hungarian Commune'. Within this group there was Lukács, who was an anti-parliamentarian, as well as Bela Kun who supported a strange tactic: participation in elections in order to denounce them, no deputies to be sent to parliament.

In Sweden, the federation of young Social Democrats (*Social-demokratiska ungdoms-förbundet*) – led by the anarchist Carl Johan Björklund (1884–1971) – which had joined the Comintern in May 1919, was resolutely anti-parliamentarian. They entered contact with

The Dutch, on the other hand, remained hesitant and divided. They were by no means as radical on the parliamentary question. The majority around Wijnkoop were electoralist and the minority were undecided. Even Gorter defended the idea of a sort of revolutionary parliamentarism right up until the summer of 1920.<sup>15</sup>

Pannekoek, on the other hand, defended an anti-parliamentary position.<sup>16</sup> Like all the left-communists, he drew attention to the change in historic period and the need to break with the democratic principles rooted in the mass of workers of Western Europe. In order for the consciousness of the class to develop, there had to be a break with 'parliamentary democracy'.<sup>17</sup>

In 1919, the Comintern did not think that refusal to participate in bourgeois parliaments was a reason to exclude the left. In a reply to Sylvia Pankhurst,<sup>18</sup> Lenin voiced the opinion that:

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the KAPD in 1920 and denounced the opportunism of Zeth Höglund (1884–1956) in Parliament: Lenin portrayed the latter as the Swedish Karl Liebknecht.

Anti-parliamentarism reached as far as Latin America: within the *Partido Socialista Internacional* of Argentina – the future Communist Party of Argentina that was created in December 1920 – there arose a strong minority in 1919, which followed Bordiga and defended the boycotting of elections.

- 15 Some weeks before he drafted his *Open Letter to Comrade Lenin*, on 1 May 1920, Gorter wrote to Lenin: 'I am not an enemy of parliamentarism. I write this simply to show you – you and the central committee – how dangerous it is to speak too much in favour of the opportunist communists' (quoted by Wiessing 1980, p. 91).
- 16 Horner (Pannekoek), 'Taktische und organisatorische Streitfragen', *Der Kommunist* (Bremen), 13 December 1919.
- 17 Pannekoek, 'De strijd over de kommunistische taktiek in Duitsland', *De Nieuwe Tijd*, 1919, p. 695.
- 18 Sylvia Pankhurst (1882–1960) worked in the suffragette-movement founded by her mother Emmeline. In 1914 she founded the East London Federation of Suffragettes, publishing *The Women's Dreadnought*. Her movement broke with feminism – which supported the war – and became the Workers' Socialist Federation in 1917, publishing the *Workers' Dreadnought*. She supported the Bolsheviks. In 1919 she was present at the Bologna Congress of the PSI. She became the paid correspondent of *The Communist International*, the publication of the Comintern. When she came back from Italy she took an active part in the Frankfurt Conference and later in the Amsterdam Conference. She rejected any form of parliamentary tactic and any form of entryism into the Labour Party. In June 1920 she helped found the Communist Party (British Section of the Third International). In the same year she, together with the shop-steward William Gallacher (1881–1965), defended anti-parliamentary and anti-syndicalist positions at the Second Congress of the Comintern. In January 1921, at the Leeds Unity Convention, her party was forced to join the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) which defended CI orthodoxy. The *Workers'*

... the parliamentary question is, at present, a specific, secondary point ... What is essential for a communist party is to be indissolubly tied to the working masses, to know how to carry out constant propaganda, to participate in each strike, give echo to every demand of the masses ... Those revolutionary workers who attack parliamentarism are quite correct insofar as they express the rejection of bourgeois parliamentarism and bourgeois democracy.<sup>19</sup>

However, the circular of the Comintern's Executive Committee (ECCI) of 1 September 1919 marked a turning-point on this question. Although parliamentary activity and electoral campaigns were still defined as 'auxiliary means', conquering Parliament seemed to be equivalent to conquering the state. The Comintern returned to the Social-Democratic conception of Parliament as the centre of the revolutionary struggle: '... [militants] go into Parliament in order to appropriate this *machinery* [*our emphasis*] and to help the masses behind the parliamentary walls to overthrow it.'<sup>20</sup>

Much more serious was the break between the left and the Comintern on the union-question. In a period in which the workers' councils had not yet appeared, should Communists work within the unions, which had now become counter-revolutionary, or rather fight to destroy them and to set up real organs for the revolutionary struggle? The left was divided. Bordiga's fraction

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*Dreadnought* remained her tendency's independent publication within the 'united' CPGB. She was imprisoned by the British government and then freed because she had been excluded from the CPGB, with her followers, in September 1921. In February 1922 she, and the others who had been excluded, founded the Communist Workers' Party, a section of Gorter's KAI which was to survive until June 1924. From then on Sylvia Pankhurst ceased to be a left-communist and a proletarian militant. She returned to her first love, feminism, and developed a passion for Esperanto. In 1928 she became the apostle of an 'anti-fascist crusade'. In 1932 she formed a Women's International Matteotti Committee, a feminist anti-fascist movement. In 1933, she vigorously defended Van der Lubbe within the British Van der Lubbe Committee. During the 1935 war between Italy and Ethiopia she supported the *Negus*. She left for Ethiopia in 1956, settling in Addis Ababa with her son Richard. She did much social work and was very well-known in Africa, in the Pan-Africa movement and the League of Coloured Peoples. Together with her son Richard, she edited the *Ethiopia Observer*. She became a friend of the *Negus* and died in Addis-Ababa, where she is buried. The Emperor Haile Selassie attended the funeral-ceremony. See Davis 1999.

19 Sylvia Pankhurst's letter and Lenin's reply (August 1919) can be found in *Die Kommunistische Internationale*, No. 4–5, pp. 91–8 ('Der Sozialismus in England').

20 Zinoviev 1979.

inclined towards the formation of 'real' Red unions: Fraina's Communist Party of America supported working with the revolutionary syndicalists of the IWW and refusing any form of 'entryism' in the reformist unions. The minority in the CPH, with Gorter and Pannekoek, became increasingly hostile to working within the NAS, considering that a break with the anarcho-syndicalist current was inevitable.

The exclusion of the German communist left because of their anti-parliamentarism and anti-unionism, was to crystallise the opposition of the international communist left. The Dutch minority was, in fact, at the head of German and international *Linkskommunismus*.

## 2 The German Question

The leadership of the KPD expelled the left-majority from the party in September 1919 by means of a manoeuvre. From the December 1918 congress, the slogan of this majority had been 'leave the unions!' (*'Heraus aus den Gewerkschaften!'*). Communist militants, in Bremen and Hamburg especially, attacked the offices of the Social-Democratic unions led by Carl Legien, seized their funds and distributed them to unemployed workers. When the first Unions (*Unionen*) were formed, the central committee of Levi and Brandler at first supported them: they called for the formation of *Unionen* in the railways and among the agricultural workers. The factory-organisations (*Betriebsorganisationen*), made up of workers and revolutionary delegates, centralised in order to form *Unionen*. With the downturn in the revolution, the latter seemed to be organs of political struggle, the successors of the factory-councils. Throughout 1919 they spread among the main sectors of the working class: miners, shipyard-workers, sailors, in the engineering-industry.

From the summer of 1919, the position of the central committee of Paul Levi and Brandler changed, not without some ulterior political motives. They wanted to get closer to the Independents in the USPD who controlled the opposition in the official unions. They began to attack the left as a 'syndicalist tendency'. In reality, such a tendency constituted a minority: it was based in Wasserkante (Bremen and Hamburg) around Laufenberg (pseudonym: Karl Erler) and Wolffheim,<sup>21</sup> who dreamed of a German IWW, and in Saxony around

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21 L. and W. were close to Dr. Carl Herz (1877–1951), lawyer, former SPD deputy in Altona, who belonged to the left wing of the SPD and from 1917 to the USPD. Before the First World War with Heinrich Laufenberg and Fritz Wolffheim he was one of three most celebrated

Rühle. These two tendencies underestimated the need for a political party of the proletariat, which they tended to reduce to a propaganda-circle for the *Unionen*. This was not the case for the vast majority who were to form the KAPD in April 1920: they were extremely hostile to both political anarcho-syndicalism and revolutionary syndicalism. They saw the *Unionen* simply as organs of struggle that carried out the directives of the party. They were thus anti-syndicalist.<sup>22</sup>

In August 1919, at the national conference in Frankfurt, Paul Levi declared that he was in favour of working in the unions as well as in Parliament. During the October congress, known as the Heidelberg Congress, Levi presented a resolution – which had not been presented for discussion in the party-sections before the congress – excluding those who refused to work in the unions and in Parliament. Contrary to the party's principle of workers' democracy (each district had one mandate regardless of its size), and in violation of the decision of the Frankfurt Conference, the central committee was allowed to exclude the left. Although the left was the majority within the KPD, it was expelled. It is worth noting that the opposition outside the party refused to follow Laufenberg, Wolffheim and Rühle who wanted to form a new party immediately.<sup>23</sup> This approach of fighting to the last to reconquer the party was a permanent concern of the communist left of the period, and is very similar to the view of Bordiga's Fraction in this respect.

The Dutch left supported the German left. Pannekoek particularly attacked Radek, who had supported Levi theoretically in his fight against the Dutch left.<sup>24</sup> He denounced the approaches that the KPD was making towards the Independents as a slide towards opportunism.<sup>25</sup> This policy expressed a petty-

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representatives of the internal opposition in the Hamburg SPD. In constant opposition to the war, he belonged in 1918/19 to the Executive of the Workers' Council in Hamburg and Altona. In a different way than the one followed by W. and L., Herz remained member of the USPD until 1922, which he left for the SPD.

22 The KAPD was hostile to anarcho-syndicalism as represented by the FAUD, formed in 1919, which adopted 'a wait-and-see' position in March 1920 at the time of the Kapp Putsch, whereas the communist left took part in the armed struggle in the Ruhr. The KPD for its part did not turn up its nose at the syndicalism of the Gelsenkirchen FAU, which came under its control in 1920–21.

23 See Kuckuck 1970, pp. 296–7.

24 Radek nevertheless attempted to oppose Levi's split from his prison-cell. After the split had taken place, Lenin was made aware of it and declared in favour of the unity of the party, seeing the Opposition as a mark of youth and inexperience.

25 Pannekoek, under the pseudonym of Horner: 'Die Gewerkschaften', in *Der Kommunist*, Bremen, 24 January 1920.

bourgeois 'Blanquist' conception of the party. By defending the non-Marxist theory that a 'small revolutionary minority could take political power and hold it', Radek merely justified the dictatorship of Levi's central committee within the party. In reality, his position was hostile to Bolshevism:

The real Russian example is to be found in the days before November 1917. At that point, the communist party never stated or believed that it should take power and that its dictatorship would be the dictatorship of the working masses. It always stated that the soviets, representatives of the masses, must seize power; the party itself had to draw up the programme, fight for it and, when at last the majority of the soviets recognised the correctness of the programme, they would take power on their own account.<sup>26</sup>

The Pannekoek of 1919 was not yet the 'councilist' Pannekoek of the 1930s and '40s. He acknowledged, as did the communist left in the 1920s, the indispensable role of the party. In spite of the criticisms levelled at them later by the 'Bordigist' current, Pannekoek and the Dutch left were not in any way connected with the anti-party, 'spontaneist' positions of Rühle, which expressed a 'blind' cult of 'following' the masses for the sake of 'democratic' formalism: 'We are not fanatics of democracy, we do not have a superstitious respect for majority-decisions and we do not hold the belief that everything that the majority does is good and must be followed'.<sup>27</sup>

In fact what the Dutch left emphasised was that a revolution was more difficult in Western Europe and that its path would be 'slower and more difficult'. Radek's recipes to accelerate events at the cost of a dictatorship of the minority in the party were the road to defeat.

In countries dominated by the 'old bourgeois culture' with its spirit of individualism and respect for the 'bourgeois ethic', Blanquist tactics are impossible. Not only do they negate the role of the masses as revolutionary subject, but they also under-estimate the strength of the enemy and the propaganda-work necessary to prepare the revolution.

What enables the revolution to be victorious is the development of consciousness in the class, which is a difficult process. For this reason Pannekoek now explicitly rejected the union-tactic for the first time. He fully supported

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26 This quotation and the following one are extracts from the article by Karl Horner: 'Der neue Blanquismus', in *Der Kommunist*, No. 27, Bremen 1920. Republished in H.M. Bock's collection: Gorter and Pannekoek 1969.

27 Ibid.



the German left, which urged the formation of factory-organisations.<sup>28</sup> The position of the Dutch left on the question of revolutionary parliamentarism remained much less clear. Pannekoek published a series of articles in *Der Kommunist*, the publication of the Bremen opposition, which oscillated in a centrist manner between the right and the left on most questions. While demonstrating that it was impossible to use parliamentarism as a 'means to the proletarian revolution' in 'the imperialist and revolutionary era', Pannekoek seemed to think it possible to use the parliamentary platform in the less developed countries.<sup>29</sup> According to him, the possibility of using it depended on 'the strength and stage of development of capitalism in each country'. This theory of 'special cases' leads to an implicit rejection of anti-parliamentarism as a new principle of the revolutionary movement in the era of decadent imperialism – 'the period of crisis and chaos' – valid internationally, in every country. It becomes simply a tactical question, to be determined according to the productive forces of a given country. This idea was only implicit, but was widely adopted later by the 'Bordigist' current.<sup>30</sup>

The theoretical ideas of the Dutch left developed slowly: they were enriched through polemic and the experience of the German Revolution. In fact, they owe as much to the German left as the latter did to the Dutch. There was an interpenetration of the various left-groupings, including the left in Italy, at an international level. A crystallisation of the positions of the communist left as a fairly complete doctrinal body was greatly encouraged by the creation of the Amsterdam Bureau of the Comintern. Its creation marked the high point of the Dutch left's audience in the international revolutionary movement.

### 3 The Amsterdam Bureau (1919–20)

In 1919 the Third International's centre was isolated in a country plunged into civil war and quarantined by the Allied armies. The ECCI therefore decided

28 Horner, in *Der Kommunist*, No. 22, 1920. Quoted in Gorter and Pannekoek 1969.

29 Horner, 'Taktische und organisatorische Streitfragen', in *Der Kommunist*, Bremen, 13 December 1919. The publication of Pannekoek's article was a contribution to the discussion on parliamentarism within the Bremen organisation. The latter published Levi's articles in favour of parliamentarism, indicating that it had moved to the right; this was soon to be confirmed.

30 Before its explosion in 1982, the Bordigist current considered participating in elections in certain regions of the Third World, where the 'bourgeois revolution' was still 'on the agenda'.

to move the International Bureau to Western Europe. The tasks of this Bureau were both propaganda and organising the different parties dependent on the respective bureaux. The Executive of the Comintern therefore created bureaux in Scandinavia, in the Balkans, in the south of Russia, and in Central Europe, in Vienna; at Borodin's instigation a Latin-American Bureau was set up in Mexico. All these organs were badly co-ordinated and greatly confused the centralisation of the International's work. However, it was still clear to the Comintern that, with the development of the revolution, the centre of the International would have to be moved to Western Europe in the near future. These bureaux were its skeleton.

But in autumn 1919, the Comintern simultaneously set up a provisional secretariat for Western Europe, based in Germany, and a provisional bureau based in the Netherlands, in permanent contact with the former. These two organs closely reflected the tendencies within the Comintern. The secretariat was under the influence of the right, that of Levi and Clara Zetkin, who inclined towards the Independents; the Amsterdam one regrouped the left-communists who opposed the KPD's move to the right.

The Comintern gave a particular role to the Dutch in propagandising and using the Amsterdam Bureau to establish links between the communist parties of Western Europe and North America. The Dutch were to direct this work. The Executive of the Comintern decided on 28 September 1919 to nominate Gorter, Pannekoek, Roland Holst – all on the left of the CPH – and Rutgers, Van Ravesteijn and Wijnkoop (the latter two represented the right). Rutgers arrived at the beginning of November to set up the 'sub-bureau' and to organise an international communist conference.<sup>31</sup> Despite their disagreements, the Bolsheviks had great confidence in the Dutch, especially Pannekoek. The latter had been expressly invited to go to Russia as a specialist to help with theoretical work.<sup>32</sup> Pannekoek refused, in order to remain materially independent of the Russian government.

From the outset, Wijnkoop tried by a series of manoeuvres to eliminate Pannekoek and especially Gorter (whom he falsely accused of being a 'psychopath') from the leadership of the Bureau.<sup>33</sup> Against the decision of the Comintern, only Rutgers, Roland Holst and Wijnkoop remained. It is true that during the short life of the Bureau, Wijnkoop tried to give the impression that he was a radical, on the 'left' of the Comintern. He took up a position against the KPD's

<sup>31</sup> Wiessing 1980, pp. 97–103.

<sup>32</sup> Pannekoek 1992, pp. 196–9.

<sup>33</sup> Wijnkoop said this at the Groningen Congress of the CPH in June 1919. Gorter broke off personal relations with him completely.

approchement with the USPD, and against the entry of the British CP into the Labour Party. Despite this radicalism, on issues such as the parliamentary question – being a Member of Parliament himself – he adopted an intermediary position. In fact, he refused to take up a position explicitly in favour of the communist left: in Germany he characterised the struggle between the German opposition and Levi's right wing as 'a struggle between big shots in the party on both sides'.<sup>34</sup> But Wijnkoop's apparent radicalism lasted just long enough to demand that the Comintern's Second Congress exclude the Independents, along with Cachin and Frossard. The only exclusion that he ultimately obtained was that of the CPH's left-wing in 1921 (see below).

Pannekoek and Roland Holst helped to draft theses in preparation for the International Conference to be held in February 1920.<sup>35</sup> They began with a call for unity among communists, who should come together in a single party, in accord with the decisions of the Comintern's Executive.

But these theses were already moving away from the Comintern's line. The 'Theses on Parliamentarism' – probably written by Rutgers<sup>36</sup> – were a compromise between the positions of the communist left and those of the International. They upheld one of the lessons of the October Revolution: that 'parliamentarism can never be an organ of the victorious proletariat'. The theory of revolutionary parliamentarism was strongly defended: '... parliamentary action comprising the most energetic forms of protest against imperialist brutality, in combination with external action, will prove to be an effective means of awakening the masses and encouraging their resistance.'

True, this declaration was qualified: it held, on the one hand, that parliaments 'are more and more degenerating into fairground-parades where swindlers cheat the masses', which demonstrated the emptiness of 'revolutionary' parliamentarism; on the other, that electoral activity was a purely local question: '... when and how parliamentarism should be used in the class-struggle is something for the working class in each country to decide'.<sup>37</sup>

These theses were only a draft: they were modified and rewritten, probably by Pannekoek. The rejection of parliamentarism became more explicit, but

34 *De Tribune*, 7 May 1920.

35 Wijnkoop remained silent on the other questions of parliamentarism and unionism. When he returned to the Netherlands, he took it upon himself to see that the Comintern's line was applied within the CPH.

36 It is difficult to know whether Rutgers or Pannekoek, or the two together, drew up the 'Theses on Parliamentarism'.

37 The theses of the Amsterdam Bureau were published as proposals in the Comintern's press of January 1920, 'Vorschläge aus Holland', in *Die Kommunistische Internationale*, No. 4–5.

was still conditional on the appearance of the workers' councils: '... when Parliament becomes the centre and the organ of the counter-revolution, and, on the other hand, the working class builds its own instruments of power in the form of the soviets, it may even be necessary to repudiate any form whatsoever of participation in parliamentary activity.'<sup>38</sup>

On the union-question, the theses were also a compromise. They recommended that revolutionary workers should form a 'revolutionary opposition within the unions'. This was the position of the Comintern, which dreamt of 'revolutionising' the counter-revolutionary trades-unions, on the grounds that large masses of workers were gathered in them. However, the Amsterdam Bureau envisaged the possibility of creating 'new organisations'. These were to be industrial unions, not corporatist unions based on a trade, with a revolutionary goal and closely based on the IWW and the British shop-stewards' movement. In the end, where the Bureau distinguished itself clearly from the Comintern was on the unions' role after the proletariat's seizure of power: whereas the Russians – like Trotsky<sup>39</sup> – no longer saw in the councils anything but a 'crude workers' parliament', the Dutch vigorously rejected the idea that the unions could 'build the new proletarian society'. This was the role of the soviets, the proletariat's unitary political organisms.

Under the influence of the German Revolution, but also that of Sylvia Pankhurst and Fraina, the Bureau began to adopt positions that were much more clear-cut, better grounded theoretically, and closer to those of the German Opposition. The Bureau could have become the centre for the regroupment of the whole international communist left, opposed to the Comintern's orientations on the union- and parliamentary questions. This was demonstrated by the International Communist Conference held in Amsterdam between 3–8 February 1920.

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38 It is this version that Lenin quotes in *Left-wing Communism, an Infantile Disorder*.

39 Trotsky in *Terrorism and Communism*:

'... the dictatorship of the soviets became possible only by means of the dictatorship of the party ... In this "substitution" of the power of the party for the power of the working class there is nothing accidental, and in reality there is no substitution at all. The Communists express the fundamental interests of the working class: thanks to the clarity of its theoretical vision, thanks to its strong revolutionary organisation, the party ensured the soviets' ability to transform themselves from crude workers' parliaments into an apparatus for the domination of labour.'

This text (Trotsky 1975) which advocates the militarisation of labour, has since been republished by the French 'Bordigists', who described it as 'one of Trotsky's most magnificent texts'.

The conference was very representative of left-communism's strength in the developed countries. The left was represented by Fraina from the USA, Sylvia Pankhurst from Britain, Van Overstraeten from Belgium, Gorter, Pannekoek and Roland Holst from the Netherlands, and Carl Stucke<sup>40</sup> from the Bremen left. The other delegates were either on the centre, like Wijnkoop, Rutgers and Mannoury, or frankly on the right, like Fred Willis (1869–1953), editor-in-chief of the socialist newspaper *The Call*, and J.F. Hodgson from the 'left' British Socialist Party. Also present was Maring-Sneevliet as an Indonesian delegate.<sup>41</sup> A number of delegates arrived after the end of the conference, probably because they were notified too late: Zetkin, Frölich, Posner,<sup>42</sup> and Münzenberg from Levi's KPD, the anti-parliamentarian Swiss Jakob Herzog

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40 Carl Stucke (1890–1940) was one of the leaders of the Bremen tendency. An anti-parliamentarian at the Amsterdam Conference, a few months later he defended participation in the April 1920 elections, but he was from the outset (April 1919) in favour of activity in the local parliaments (Kuckuck 1970, p. 212).

41 Sneevliet uttered not a word throughout the conference. He was accompanied by a correspondent of the CPH, the Chinese Indonesian Tiun Shu Kua, presented as a 'Chinese comrade'.

42 Under this pen name of *Posner* or *Posener* one or two agents of the Comintern in Western Europe could hide themselves:

- Jakov Reich (1886–1956) [alias: James Thomas; Jakob Reichenberg; James Gordon; James Reich; Arnold Rubinstein; Thomas Rubinstein]. This last one, born in Lemberg (Lvov), served for a year in the Austro-Hungarian Army, and was a student in Switzerland when the Russian Revolution occurred. He edited the *Russische Nachrichten*, the information bulletin of the Soviet diplomatic mission in Bern in 1918. He was among those who helped to organise the First Congress of the Comintern in March 1919, and was sent to Berlin later in the year to set up its Western European Secretariat and 'orientate' the KPD, activity he ran under the pseudonym of 'Comrade Thomas', but was more generally known as 'Fatty' or the 'Dicke'. [See: Alexander Vatlin: "'Genosse Thomas" und die Geheimtätigkeit der Komintern in Deutschland 1919–1925', *Die Komintern 1919–1929* (Mainz: 1993). Later member of the KPO, then SAP.

- Mieczysław Warszawski-Broński (1882–1938), born in Lodz. Known also under the name of *Braun*. Member of the SDKPiL, like Radek, partisan of Lenin's positions before 1914, Bolshevik Minister for Trade and Industry in 1918, consular agent of the new Russian State in Berlin, was in touch with the German revolutionaries. Expelled from Berlin in November 1918, he came back as diplomat to Germany in 1919 in order to build the Western European Secretariat of the Comintern. He was a major figure of the K.P.D. under the pseudonym of 'Posner'. Deeply criticised for the position taken during the putsch of Kapp (April 1920), he was called back to Moscow. Shot during the Great Terror on September first, 1938.

(1892–1931), and the secretary of the Latin American Bureau, F.K. Puerto.<sup>43</sup> The delegates from Finland and Spain also arrived too late.

This conference resembled an International Congress by its duration, the amount of work it accomplished, and the size of the delegations from different countries on three continents. It was more representative than the Imola and Frankfurt Conferences which preceded it.<sup>44</sup> It should be noted that the Dutch were far from ready for clandestine work. The entire conference was kept under surveillance both by spies and by the Dutch police, who noted everything that was said and decided.<sup>45</sup> Clara Zetkin was arrested on her arrival in Amsterdam,

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43 This was undoubtedly the pseudonym of the Russian Borodin, who had been given responsibility for the secretariat of the Latin-American Bureau, and later for the Comintern in China, where he played a non-negligible role in the defeat of the Chinese proletariat as a result of the CP's policy of merging with the *Kuomintang*.

44 The Imola Conference of 10 October 1919 was an international meeting between a few Western-European delegates, and the leadership of the Italian Socialist Party, to gather information. With the exception of Pankhurst, the delegates were far from being left-wing. The December 1919 Frankfurt Conference was wholly informal. It produced a secretariat composed of Karl Radek (1885–1939), Paul Levi (1883–1930), August Thalheimer (1884–1948), Mieczyslaw Bronski (1882–1941), Wilhelm Münzenberg (1889–1940) and Eduard Fuchs (1870–1940), who represented the right wing of the Comintern.

45 Fraina's courier, Jacob Nosovitsky (1890–?), who took part in the conference, was in fact a police-agent. Of Russian origin, he had joined the American federal police out of hatred for the Russian revolution; he 'worked' also for Scotland Yard, to which he sent his reports. When Nosovitsky was finally unmasked at the Amsterdam Conference, suspicion fell on Fraina. This last was eventually completely cleared by an enquiry commission set up by the Comintern, held in Moscow. Throughout the conference, the police recorded the proceedings from the next room, and gave the bourgeois press details of the interventions, resolutions, and names of the participants. Several delegates, among them Clara Zetkin, were arrested by the police. *Het Algemeen Handelsblad*, one of Amsterdam's most famous dailies, linked to the upper ranks of the Dutch bourgeoisie, gives some very interesting details on the conference in its 14, 15 and 18 February, 1920 issues. It tells us that from 3 February onwards, the conference took place first in Mannoury's house, then in Wijnkoop's house, and finally in *De Tribune's* Amsterdam office. It then left Amsterdam for Rutgers's house in Amersfoort. The choice of such meeting-places, well known to the authorities and constantly under police-surveillance, reveals the organisers' negligence in security-matters, and, above all, their lack of experience in underground-work. According to *Het Handelsblad*, the Soviet government had sent 20 million roubles in diamonds for the Amsterdam Bureau. For the first day, it gave details of the Dutch participants, particularly Henk Sneevliet, Louis de Visser (1878–1945), Willem van Leuven (1880–1957), Gerrit Mannoury (1867–1956), of the CPH; Engelbertus Bouwman (1882–1955) from the NAS; Bart de Ligt (1883–1938), an old member of the *Bond van Christen-Socialisten*; the preacher John William Kruyt (1877–1943), from the same Christian-Socialist organisation (later, a CPH

and was only freed after the intervention of the right-wing Social-Democrat Wibaut, who was notorious for his repression of the workers in 1917.<sup>46</sup> Was this an homage to the KPD's 'moderate' leadership?

Described by Clara Zetkin as a 'rump-conference', it nonetheless represented left-communism on two essential questions: the rejection of trades-unionism, and the refusal of any form of entryism into parties linked to the Second International, such as the Labour Party in Britain.

Fraina's theses on unionism, which were approved unanimously, went further than the proposals mentioned above. They excluded any work in the trades-unions, which were 'definitively integrated into capitalism', and attached politically to 'labourism', whose 'governmental expression is state-capitalism'. They recommended revolutionary industrial unionism after the seizure of power; by classing this with factory-councils, the theses implicitly rejected the apolitical attitude of the IWW. In its support for industrial unionism, the position of the Bureau's left could seem very close to that of the KAPD.<sup>47</sup> But this was only in appearance, since both the KAPD and the CPH minority were later to reject all forms of unionism, including the revolutionary and industrial variety.

But the Bureau remained confused as to the distinction between the political party and the revolutionary union. Despite the vigorous opposition of Pankhurst and Fraina, the conference accepted the representation on the Bureau of economic organisations like the shop-stewards. This in fact was also the practice of the Comintern until its Second Congress.

The conference's most important decision concerned Britain, where there existed both a very strong Labour Party linked to the Second International,

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member after 1919, and NKVD agent in Germany in the 1930s: in the Dutch Resistance, he was shot by the Gestapo in Berlin in July 1943); Helena Ankersmit (1869–1944), secretary of the *Bond van Sociaal-Democratische Vrouwenclubs* ('Social-Democratic Women's Clubs'), a friend of Clara Zetkin and translator for the conference; Richard André Manuel (1889–1945), an active militant of the Hungarian Soviet Republic in 1919, who had afterwards taken refuge in the Netherlands and joined the CPH. In his memoirs, Pannekoek notes the absence of any conspiratorial work amongst the Dutch: 'Here, we lacked any talent for conspiracy: at lunchtime we swarmed into a café with a garden, and continued our discussions in several languages at table. We must surely have given the public the impression of an international conference' (Pannekoek 1982, p. 198).

46 See Clara Zetkin's – often tendentious – account presented to the KPD's Third Congress on 26 February 1920 (in Broué 1979, pp. 412–20). Zetkin demanded that the Bureau should be moved to Germany, which would have meant the dissolution of the Amsterdam Bureau.

47 See the IWW's notion of 'One Big Union', which would unite all the industrial unions. Fraina had been a member of the IWW.

and left-socialist parties – the BSP and ILP<sup>48</sup> – similar to the German USPD. Lenin and the rest of the Comintern wanted the communist groups to join the Labour Party in order to win over the masses. This contradicted the slogan of splitting revolutionaries from the Second International, which was considered dead, and whose parties were seen as the left wing of the bourgeoisie, and not as the right wing of the workers' movement, or as a 'centrist' current, when they were dominated by the 'left'. At the beginning of 1920, the Comintern's policy changed, to urge the formation of mass-parties: either by merging the communist groups with the majority-centrist currents, such as the Independents in Germany, or by the small communist groups' entry into a party of the Second International in the 'special case' of Britain. But a policy built on 'special cases' always leads to opportunism.

The resolution adopted by the conference was written by Fraina. It replaced one written by Wijnkoop, which was too vague, and avoided the questions of communist unity and the split with the Second International. Fraina put forwards the necessity of separating not only from the social-patriots, but also from the 'opportunists': in other words, the current that wavered between the Second and Third Internationals. This position was identical to Bordiga's.<sup>49</sup> It was symptomatic that the resolution in favour of a split with a view to forming the Communist Party, and against the 'supposed possibility that the new British Communist Party could be tied to the Labour Party' – in Pankhurst's words<sup>50</sup> – should be rejected by the delegates of the BSP and by one Dutch delegate (Willem van Leuven). As such, the resolution seemed to apply equally to the Labour Party and the USPD.

In fact, the Amsterdam Bureau became the centre of the left-opposition in the Third International; it held executive power, since it demanded that the Berlin Secretariat, which was in the hands of the right, should confine itself to Eastern-European business. The American sub-bureau,<sup>51</sup> which was

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48 The British Socialist Party, founded in 1911, was to become the main component of the CPGB established in July 1920. The Independent Labour Party was founded during the 1890s on the basis of the Fabian Society; it was not a Marxist party, and although it denounced the war in 1914, its viewpoint was a pacifist one.

49 In Italy, the 'centrist' tendency, fought by Bordiga, was represented by the maximalist current of Giacinto Menotti Serrati (1874–1926).

50 P. Broué 1979, p. 384.

51 The sub-bureau became, after the Second Congress, the Pan-American Bureau of the Comintern. Installed in Mexico City, it was composed of the Japanese Sen Katayama (1860–1933), Luis Fraina and the American Richard (Charles) Philipps (1895–1985), using various Spanish pseudonyms (Manuel, Gomez, Jesus Ramirez), who died in Moscow.



in the charge of Fraina's CP of America, could have become a centre for left-propaganda throughout the American continent. Faced with this danger, and just as the Bureau hailed the formation of the KAPD in Germany, the Comintern decided on 4 May 1920 to dissolve the Bureau by radio-message from Moscow. The centre of opposition henceforth moved to Germany, putting an end to any inclination towards opposition on the part of Wijnkoop and the CPH majority.

#### 4 The KAPD and the Dutch Minority of the CPN

The minority of the CPH hailed the KAPD's foundation at its Congress (4–5 April 1920) with enthusiasm.<sup>52</sup> It published a translation of the KAPD's programme in its organ, *De Roode Vaan*. It became the KAPD's voice in the CPH against the Wijnkoop leadership, which contented itself with publishing the KPD's positions against the *'Linksradikale'*.<sup>53</sup>

Henceforth, under the leadership of Luteraan, Bernard Verduin, Bram and Emmanuel Korper,<sup>54</sup> the minority formed a structured opposition, openly defending anti-union and anti-parliamentary positions – the former directed largely against the NAS.<sup>55</sup> Wijnkoop could fairly consider the minority as 'a Dutch KAP tendency' and after the Comintern's Second Congress, he fought it with every means at his command (see below).

Whereas the Dutch could continue the struggle within the party, the leadership of the German opposition found itself in a quite different position. Against the advice of Rühle, Wolffheim, and Laufenberg, they refused to consider the formation of another party, and demanded, as the majority of the old party, the readmission into the KPD (Spartakus) of those who had been excluded. However, the KPD (Spartakus) congress of February 1920 refused any readmission. The KAPD's formation was precipitated by the events that accom-

52 The proceedings of the KAPD's founding congress have been republished with an introduction by H.M. Bock: see Bock (ed.) 1977.

53 *De Tribune* of 8 May 1920 supported the KPD. *De Roode Vaan*, Nos. 11 and 12 (June/July) published the KAPD's programme.

54 Abraham (Bram) Korper was to become one of the leaders of the KAPN.

55 The NAS had a transport-federation, led by Sneevliet, who was on the right of the CPH and strongly syndicalist. The anarcho-syndicalist NAS, with its sympathies for Wijnkoop, was a particular object of dislike for *De Roode Vaan*, ever since September 1919 when it banned all discussion on parliamentarism and the unions (See: *De Roode Vaan*, No. 2, September 1919).

panied the Kapp Putsch. Levi and Brandler's party declared that it would not attack the Social-Democrat government, but, on the contrary, would support it:

The KPD sees in the formation of a socialist government excluding the bourgeois-capitalist parties, a highly desirable situation for the proletarian masses' self-activity, their maturing in order to exercise the proletarian dictatorship. Its attitude towards the government will be that of a *loyal opposition* [our emphasis], as long as this government offers guarantees for the workers' political activity, as long as it combats the bourgeois counter-revolution with every means at its disposal, and as long as it does not hinder the social and organisational strengthening of the workers.<sup>56</sup>

Under the august authority of the *Reich*-Commissioner Carl Severing, a member of the SPD, the Social Democracy certainly did use 'every means at its disposal', including the *Reichswehr*, to crush the insurrection of the Ruhr workers.<sup>57</sup> To this 'loyal opposition' the KPD added, some time afterwards, a small, nationalist finishing-touch: the policy of the Ebert government was condemned as 'a crime against the whole nation itself'.<sup>58</sup> The KPD thus prefigured both the tactic of 'workers' governments' and the 'united front' with the Social Democracy, applied in 1923, and the 'national Bolshevism' which led it, in the same year, to collaborate more-or-less directly with the Nazis.<sup>59</sup>

The KAPD was created in opposition to this opportunist policy, and as a party of revolutionary action. It did not see itself in opposition to the Third International: quite the contrary, it declared that it was the *Spartakusbund* (KPD) which was in contradiction with the International. The KAPD's first act,

56 *Die Rote Fahne*, 26 March 1920. Quoted in KAPD 1926: this pamphlet is a veritable mine of quotations on the KPD's 'opportunism'.

57 See Meinberg 1973. This is the testimony of one of the Ruhr insurrection's Communist leaders on the repression carried out by Carl Severing.

58 *Die Rote Fahne*, April 7, 1920. Quoted in KAPD 1926, p. 25.

59 1923 was the year of the KPD's 'Schlageter line'. Albert Leo Schlageter was a Nazi, shot by the French army for sabotage in the occupied Ruhr. He was presented as a 'hero' by Radek, who declared in *Die Rote Fahne* of 23 June 1923: 'In Germany, the strong insistence on the nation is a revolutionary act, just as it is in the colonies.' This nationalism was shared by the KPD's 'left', presented as 'leftist' or 'ultra-left'. For example, in a debate against young Nazis in a high school, Ruth Fischer (1895–1961) glorified 'our German fatherland' (quoted by Franz Pfemfert, *Die Aktion*, No. 14, 31 July 1923).

agreed unanimously by its founding congress, was to declare – not to request – its immediate attachment to the Third International.<sup>60</sup>

Nonetheless, although the KAPD's programme was inspired more by the theses of Gorter and Pannekoek than by those of the Comintern, it was, from the outset, much less homogeneous than the Dutch left. With the KAPD's foundation, the opposition was made up of four tendencies:

i) The Bremen tendency:

This tendency organised the first *Unionen* in northern Germany;<sup>61</sup> anti-union and anti-parliamentary, it vigorously set itself apart from the Hamburg section's 'national Bolshevism'. It refused to join the KAPD; as the price of its return to the KPD, it dissolved the *Union* that it had founded, and took part in elections.

ii) The 'national-Bolshevik' tendency:

Led by Wolffheim and Laufenberg, this tendency had the majority in Hamburg.<sup>62</sup> It advocated a revolutionary war against the Entente, supported by the Red Army. Wolffheim and Laufenberg were theoreticians of the *Unionen*, and were spreading nationalist conceptions foreign to Marxism as early as 1919: 'The enterprise-councils become the element of national regroupment, of the

60 Bock (ed.) 1977, p. 207. The congress decided to send Jan Appel and Franz Jung to Moscow in order to announce this membership of the Comintern.

61 See Kuckuck 1970, pp. 318–49. A small group of seventy to a hundred militants followed the KAPD in Bremen, and around a thousand the local AAU. In 1924, 12 militants were still organised by the KAPD. The local group was led by Käthe Ahrens (1877–?), ex-IKD, treasurer, and Johann Onasch (1884–1965). Onasch, a friend of Ernst Schneider (*alias* Ikarus), was a leader of the local AAU. After 1931, he became member of the clandestine group *Rote Kämpfer*; in jail in 1933 and 1936–40. After 1945 he joined the KPD in Bremen. See also: Kuckuck 1996.

62 The national-bolshevik tendency at first had not been fought in Hamburg by the KAPD leader Jan Appel before his journey to Russia in May–June 1920. Laufenberg and Wolffheim leaned on the shipyards' workers who were knocked down by the unemployment. As Ruth Fischer underlined it, the effects of the German defeat on the economic terrain came earlier in Hamburg, 'lung' of the German international trade, which was annihilated, whereas shipyards turned idled. [Ruth Fischer, *Stalin und der deutsche Kommunismus*, vol. 1, Dietz, Berlin, 1991, p. 127].

National-bolshevism had also some influence in Frankfurt/Main, but remained unimportant elsewhere.

national organisation, of national unity, because they are the basic element, the original cell of socialism'.<sup>63</sup>

Worst of all, the Hamburg tendency saw nationalism, not internationalism, as a weapon of the proletariat: 'The national idea has ceased to be a means of power in the hands of the bourgeoisie against the proletariat, and is turning against the former ... The great dialectic of history makes the national idea an instrument of proletarian power against the bourgeoisie.'<sup>64</sup>

iii) The 'anti-party' Unionist tendency of Rühle and Pfemfert:

The communist tendency of Rühle was the only one in the German workers' councils to resign in November 1918, one week after the break-up of the revolution: 'Every day the revolution is more and more revealed as a grandiose deceptive manoeuvre, desired and prepared by the bourgeois government in order to save capitalist society from threatened doom ... The task of pushing forward, escalating, and completing the incipient revolutionary movement can be accomplished only by Communists.'<sup>65</sup> After March 1919, Rühle's tendency decided to contribute to the building of the revolutionary factory-organisations (*Betriebsorganisationen*), forerunners of the *Unionen*, created in October 1919.

The *Unionen*, with some 80,000 members in 1920 (this was to peak at 200,000 in 1921) had not been admitted into the KAPD (30,000 members), which stuck by a rigorous separation between the party and factory-organisations. A workerist minority – which was very strong in Saxony, both amongst the workers and intellectuals like Rühle – upheld the idea that 'the revolution is not a party-matter'. It rejected the notion of a proletarian political party and any organisational centralisation, preferring federalism, and even localism. With its 'factoryism' it was, in fact, closer to Gramsci than to Gorter, who was a firm partisan of the political party.<sup>66</sup> In the left-radical literary periodical *Die Aktion*,<sup>67</sup>

63 *Kommunistische Arbeiter-Zeitung* (KAZ), Hamburg, 3 June 1919.

64 KAZ (Hamburg), No. 19, January 1920, 'Volkskrieg und Volksorganisation', article by Erler (Laufenberg).

65 Rühle, chairman of the workers and soldiers' council, Dresden, 16 November 1918.

66 'The communists must be the vanguard of the masses ... They must be the pure, crystalline nucleus of the masses ... The international communist party alone leads towards the revolution and towards socialism.' See Gorter 1920b.

67 *Die Aktion* was published in 1911 by Franz Pfemfert (1879–1954), who became in 1920 member of the KAP until his expulsion in April 1921. Thereafter, the periodical was orientated towards the positions of the AAU-E, until 1926. See Pfemfert 1985.

it found a centre for the regroupment of all those discontent with centralisation, first that of the KPD(s), then that of the KAPD. In 1919, there was little difference between the Unionist tendency and national Bolshevism. Some, like Rühle, were very briefly propagandists for a national communism. The 'radical' Rühle denounced the Treaty of Versailles, signed by the USPD, in terms that differed little from those used by Wolffheim and Laufenberg: 'The USPD peace is the ruin of Germany, the end of the revolution, the strangulation of socialism, the decadence of our culture [sic], the annihilation of our future. The only means of salvation is Bolshevism.'<sup>68</sup>

#### iv) The Berlin tendency:

This tendency was in a large majority in the opposition, and also later in the KAPD, and was not limited to Berlin. Led by intellectuals from the socialist students' sphere<sup>69</sup> like Schröder, Schwab and Reichenbach, and by workers like Emil Sach, Adam Scharrer, and Jan Appel<sup>70</sup> – all excellent organisers – it was rigorously centralist. It considered the *Unionen* as mere emanations of the party, and so rejected any form of revolutionary syndicalism, still more

68 Rühle 1919.

69 See Müller 1977.

70 After the March 1922 split, when Schröder, Goldstein, Reichenbach, Dethmann, Gottberg and Emil Sach decided to found a KAI, the KAPD leadership was entirely composed of workers. The members of the editorial board of the theoretical periodical *Proletarier* were also workers – Adam Scharrer (pseudonym: Adam); August Wülfrath (pseudonym: Friedrich Oswald); Carl Happ (pseudonym: Carl Schlicht); Pinkowski, an engineering-worker (pseudonym: Franz Buckow or Richard Petersen); Ernst Biedermann (pseudonym: Ernst Lichtenberg); Paul Heinzelmann (1888–1961) (pseudonyms: Heinz Elm, Heinz Elm-Mann, Heinz Elmann), brother-in-law of Scharrer, writer, printer and publisher; and Fritz Kunze (12/10/1895–?) (pseudonym: Sackermann) – with the exception of the Bulgarian Krum Zhekov (pseudonyms: Burg, Charlotte Burg, or Burger), and the lawyer Ludwig Barbasch (28/8/1892–12/7/1967), who was known under the pseudonyms of Brandis and Fedor Günther. This last was a militant of the first rank. In 1918–19, during the revolution, he was USPD state-minister without portfolio in the councils-government of Mecklenburg. Condemned to death after the defeat of the revolution, he was amnestied. A member of the KAPD from 1921 to 1933, but in the underground in order to allow his activity as a lawyer. Arrested by the Nazis and held in isolation in the Brandenburg concentration-camp from March to September 1933, he was then freed at request of the former chancellor Heinrich Brüning (1885–1970), and allowed to migrate in 1934 to Palestine. He came back from Tel-Aviv to Germany in 1958 and became a business lawyer in Wiesbaden. [See: Helge Bei der Wieden, *Die mecklenburgischen Regierungen und Minister 1918–1952*, Köln-Wien: Böhlau Verlag, 1977, p. 40; and *BHdE* 1999.]

so anarchistic federalism. It was influenced theoretically more by Gorter than by Pannekoek, given the latter's opposition to Rosa Luxemburg's theory of decadence.

The new party was made up of three antagonistic tendencies, and the theoretical weight of the Dutch was decisive in orientating the KAPD's tactics. This is what Pannekoek did, in a letter addressed to the party on 5 July 1920, and immediately published by the *KAZ*.<sup>71</sup> Pannekoek declared his solidarity with the KAPD, and declared its agitation 'correct both in its principles and in organisation'; he nonetheless made explicit certain reservations. This was not the case with Gorter, who in a telegram uncritically declared the KAPD's principles to be 'magnificent', and offered his wholehearted written collaboration.<sup>72</sup> Pannekoek, rightly, was more critical. He rejected the Unionist conception which saw the enterprise-organisations as regrouping a minority of 'enlightened workers' who recognised the 'reactionary' role of the unions and formed 'a little group in the midst of the great masses, still inactive and hanging on to the old unions'. This double organisation – the *Unionen* alongside the KAPD – had no purpose: the *Unionen* and the party in reality organised the same workers. Pannekoek felt that the *Unionen* were permanent 'factory-groups' of the party, enlarged to include a few worker-sympathisers, and not 'workers' groups', which would organise in struggle to form action-committees (*Aktionsausschüsse*). Much later, and at the cost of its own disintegration, the KAPD was forced to recognise this reality, no longer seeing the *Unionen* as anything but the pyramidal matrix of action-committees.<sup>73</sup>

It was important not to confuse the *Unionen* with the councils, or with the party. The future belonged, not to the *Unionen*, but to the soviets, regrouping the vast majority of workers:

In the long run, we will have:

- 1) As the foundation of proletarian democracy, the concentration of all the workers of an enterprise who, through their representatives, the factory-councils, will exercise social and political leadership – in Rus-

<sup>71</sup> *KAZ* (Berlin), No. 112, 6th July 1920, 'Brief des Genossen Pannekoeks'.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> In 1921 and afterwards, the KAPD advocated the formation of action-committees, which would be attached to the *Unionen*. The AAU's separation from the KAPD in 1929 led to the dislocation of the KAPD, which survived as a small legal group until 1933: in 1931, the AAU merged with the AAU-E to form the KAU, attached to the Dutch GIC.

- sia, the soviets (this organisation based on the enterprise, bringing together all the workers, is generally called the factory-organisation).
- 2) An active, conscious minority which will take into its hands the leadership of the soviets, because of its clear judgement and revolutionary will: the communists. In my opinion a second minority-group, almost exclusively composed of communists, has no purpose.

Pannekoek's great clear-sightedness here should be compared with Gorter's conceptions, which were at times 'factoryist'<sup>74</sup> and even 'educationist': the *Unionen* would educate the conscious workers in the idea of the councils, while the communist party would educate those workers who possessed a superior degree of consciousness.<sup>75</sup> It is true that, even here, Pannekoek tended to identify the factory-councils with the soviets (territorial councils in the town and countryside that brought together strata beyond the industrial proletariat), of which they are only a part. This was a frequent mistake in the revolutionary movement at the time, and should be seen as an aspect of the understanding that the factory-councils are the soviets' revolutionary centre of gravity.

Pannekoek's other critique concerned the presence of the 'national-Bolshevik' current within the KAPD. This current was a monstrous aberration in the party. Its anti-Semitism brought it close to the worst forms of nationalism. In particular, Pannekoek denounced the Hamburgers' anti-Semitic attacks on Paul Levi: 'because Levi is a Jew, he will play the card of Jewish finance-capital'. Although the KAPD's critique of national Bolshevism was correct, Pannekoek considered it still 'much too gentle'. This current had to be eliminated from the party:

You underestimate the damage done [by national Bolshevism] in undermining communism's most fundamental principle. In my opinion, you will not be able to coexist with Wolffheim and Laufenberg. If the KAPD wants to become a leading force, orientating Germany's revolutionary masses by its firm clarity, it is necessary to put forwards a clear viewpoint,

74 'In the factory, the proletarian has some significance. There he is a fighter, because he is a worker. There he can express himself as a free man, as a free fighter. There, he can be active every day and every hour in debate, in the struggle. There, because the revolution comes from the factories, he can truly fight, arms in hand.' Gorter 1921b.

75 'The factory-organisation gives its members the most general understanding of the revolution, for example knowledge of the nature and meaning of workers' councils (soviets), and of the dictatorship of the proletariat. The party brings together those workers who have a greater, more profound knowledge' (Gorter and Pannekoek 1969, pp. 228–46).

precisely on the national question: *the next party-congress must settle the issue.* [Pannekoek's emphasis.]

There was no ambiguity on this question in the KAPD. The congress held in Berlin over 1–4 August 1920 ended with the complete elimination of national Bolshevism's supporters.<sup>76</sup> This necessary move by the party, urged by Pannekoek, was finally completed a few months later with the departure of the federalist elements, closer to revolutionary syndicalism than to Marxism, and hostile to centralisation and above all to membership of the Third International.<sup>77</sup>

Pannekoek's letter concluded by addressing the question of membership of the Comintern. The Dutch-German current – 'our current', as Pannekoek wrote – should engage a merciless struggle within the International against opportunism, should the latter become the 'international tactic of communism'. Under these conditions, the Dutch and Germans should 'prepare themselves, as a radical minority, to be in opposition'.

## 5      **The Turning-Point of the Second Congress: Infantile or Lethal Disorder of Communism?**

The Second Congress of the Comintern took place in the midst of the Red Army's 'revolutionary war' against Poland, which the Bolsheviks hoped would inevitably draw Germany, and then the whole of Western Europe, into the revolution. In this context, the Russian Bolsheviks' weight in the International was enormous. Lenin's theses on tactics were adopted, despite the presence of left-communists such as Bordiga and Sylvia Pankhurst. In reality, the KPD's programme of 18 December which, together with the programme of the Russian CP, had been at the basis of the Comintern's foundation, was abandoned. In recommending work in the trades-unions, the KPD's merger with the USPD, and the CPGB's entry into the Labour Party, the Comintern rejected the left's theses in favour of those of the right. There was a serious danger that mass-parties would be formed from parties that had only just left the Second International, and were barely purged of their opportunist majorities. The Comintern was

<sup>76</sup> See the proceedings of the congress devoted to the question of national Bolshevism: Klockner (ed.) 1981. Those Hamburg militants who left the party with Wolffheim and Laufenberg were to return to the KAPD later, but on an individual basis.

<sup>77</sup> After the departure of Rühle and his 'Saxon tendency', it was the turn of Pfemfert and his friends to leave the KAPD. See Klockner (ed.) 1981.



being seduced by the mirage of numbers. Had not Zinoviev answered Wijnkoop (who was playing the radical to earn forgiveness for his pro-Entente policy during the war) that '[the congress] should listen to the [USPD] delegates who represent 800,000 members and speak to the masses, rather than to the advice of Wijnkoop, whose party only has 1,500 members after fifteen years of activity?'<sup>78</sup> The way was open to the formation of enormous parties: like the 400,000-strong party created in December 1920 by the merger of Levi's party with the left wing of the USPD; or the formation of Šmeral's Czechoslovak Communist Party in May 1921, a particularly opportunist party whose 350,000 members rallied the majority of the country's workers.<sup>79</sup>

The Comintern was certainly aware of the 'danger'. It recognised the 'threat of invasion by undecided and hesitant groups that have not yet been able to break with the ideology of the Second International'. Many communist parties still contained 'opportunist and reformist elements'. As early as 1919, a high price had been paid for the merger of Hungarian communists and socialists.<sup>80</sup> The Comintern's '21 Conditions' of membership were drawn up to confront precisely this danger. Although they had been directed against the right-wing and centrist elements, they were just as valid for the left-communist current. Point 9 obliged the communist parties to work within the unions. Point 11 – like Bukharin's theses on parliamentarism – implied a duty to get deputies elected to parliament. As for Point 21, drawn up by Bordiga, it could exclude the right, but also the left, should the latter reject Points 9 and 11. Point 12, demanding 'an iron discipline close to military discipline', and directed against anti-centralist elements, was a serious threat to the communist parties' lefts, which were far from being federalists in the same way as Rühle. Wijnkoop, a member of the commission for conditions of admission to the congress, made skilful use of these same conditions to eliminate the left from the CPN a year later.

But the Comintern did not want to eliminate the left: it considered that the danger from the right was much greater, and that 'left-wing radicalism' was, in the end, a benign disorder. As Lenin wrote: 'the error represented by left doctrinarism in the communist movement is at present a thousand times less dangerous and less serious than the error represented by right doctrinarism.'<sup>81</sup>

78 Komintern 1921a, p. 133.

79 With the entry of Sudeten German communists, the Czech CP had 400,000 members, in a population of 12 million. Bohumir Šmeral had been a 'social-patriot' in 1914.

80 V.I. Lenin, 'Terms of admission into the Communist International', July 1920, *Collected Works*, Vol. 31, Progress Publishers, Moscow 1965, pp. 206–11.

81 Lenin 1973, p. 108.

The Dutch-German current was not, therefore, kept away from the Second Congress. The KAPD sent two official delegates, Jan Appel and Franz Jung, together with the Unionist sailor Hermann Knüfken. Due to the difficulties of reaching Russia by other means, they embarked in Cuxhaven as stowaways in the fishing-boat *Senator Schröder*, and hijacked it, with the help of the Cuxhaven sailor Willy Klahre, a member of the Seemannsbund (Seamen's Association), and the help of the crew. As they passed the northern tip of Heligoland, they arrested the captain and his officers at gunpoint and locked them up in the forward cabin. The journey began on the 20 April and ended on 1 May at Alexandrovsk, the seaport of Murmansk. They were received as comrades, and thereafter travelled on the railway, built during the war, to Petrograd. In Petrograd, they briefly met Lenin, who gave the hijackers the nickname of 'comrade-pirates'.

They presented the views of their current and formally committed themselves, following the Comintern's open letter to the KAPD,<sup>82</sup> to the exclusion from the party of both the 'national Bolsheviks' and Rühle's anti-party current. But the KAPD lost contact with their delegates, and, not knowing whether or not they had arrived safely in Moscow, sent a second delegation, comprising Otto Rühle and August Merges.

In fact, Merges,<sup>83</sup> and still more Rühle – whose status as a party-member was uncertain<sup>84</sup> – represented the federalist minority, which wanted to dissolve the

82 'Open letter to the members of the KAPD (2 June 1920)', translated in: Broué 1979, pp. 224–42. Apart from the exclusion of Rühle and the 'national Bolsheviks', the Comintern's Executive demanded the acceptance of the Second Congress' resolutions, the dispatch of delegates to Moscow for the congress, and the formation of a provisional joint organisation-bureau between the KPD and KAPD.

83 August Merges (1870–1945) was a leader of the *Revolutionsclub* and the *Spartakusbund* in Braunschweig during the war. Arrested for anti-militarism in 1916, in November 1918 he became president of the Braunschweig councils-republic. In February 1919, he was elected USPD deputy to both the Landstag and the Reichstag, but ostentatiously resigned his mandate to become an anti-parliamentarian. Unlike Rühle, he remained a member of the KAPD at least until 1921, along with Pfemfert. As member of the AAU-E *Union*, in 1926 he joined Pfemfert's *Spartakus No. 2*, which published the periodical *Spartakus* until 1933. Under the Nazis he led – with Minna Faßhauer (1875–1949) – a clandestine group, known as the *Kommunistische Räte-Union* or the so-called *Merges-Gruppe*, until he was arrested in 1935, and condemned to imprisonment in a fortress. In 1937 he was heavily tortured by the Gestapo and then sentenced to house arrest, dying in March 1945. It is thus incorrect to say that he returned to the KPD and was killed by the SS in 1933, which is the unreliable version of events advanced by Pierre Broué. For a biography of Merges see Berger 1979, pp. 109–10.

84 No. 146 of KAZ (October 1920), Berlin, maintained that Rühle had never been a member

party, and in general all the communist parties, into a system of *Unionen*. Out of hostility to any international centralisation, they consequently implicitly rejected the International's existence. Rühle travelled extensively in Russia, and came back to Germany convinced that the revolution was degenerating, and that the dictatorship of the Bolshevik party was 'the springboard for the appearance of a new Soviet bourgeoisie'. And yet the two delegates – without referring to the KAPD – refused to take part in the next congress, despite the urging of Lenin, Zinoviev, Radek and Bukharin, who accorded them advisory status in the proceedings. On their way home, in Petrograd, the Executive granted them a voting status, not just advisory status, without even requiring them to accept unconditionally the decisions of the congress and the KAPD's entry into the KPD: 'While we were already in Petrograd on the road home, the Executive sent after us a new invitation to the congress, with the statement that the KAPD had been allowed the right to voting status at the congress, even though it fulfilled none of the draconian conditions of the open letter [to the KAPD], and had not promised to do so.'

Rühle and Merges refused, shocked by the reality of the 'new Russia', which Rühle had earlier experienced with an 'abundance of impressions more unpleasant than pleasant': 'Russia was suffering in all of its limbs, from every disease'. They had discussed with Radek, Zinoviev, Bukharin and Lenin. Radek said to them that 'they must in the name of [their] party declare at the beginning of the congress that the KAPD will abide by all decisions'. Neither of the two delegates would fall into the ambush. According to Rühle, the Comintern's congress 'would pronounce the death-sentence upon the KAPD', by 'dissolving it into the KPD.' But Rühle and Merges, by rejecting all participation in the Comintern congress, had also lost any hope of discussing with other left-communist oppositionists.

There followed a crisis in the KAPD, which ended with Rühle's expulsion from the party. All the conditions demanded by the Comintern – except the merger with the KPD, which itself had joined with the Independents – were fulfilled. The 'national-Bolshevik' and anti-party currents were expelled.

With the support of the KAPD leadership in Berlin, Gorter pushed with all his strength for joining the Third International. It was necessary not to fight against the International but to fight within it for the triumph of the KAPD's viewpoint.

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of the KAPD, and therefore could not be expelled from it. After Rühle's return, the KAPD declared its solidarity with him: its first congress did not 'recognise the right of the Comintern's Executive Committee to interfere with the KAPD's affairs'. Rühle's report on his journey to Russia was published in *Die Aktion*, 'Bericht über Moskau', No. 39/40, 2 October 1920.

There was little difference between this position and that – later, it is true – of the Italian Communist left.<sup>85</sup> But the idea of forming only an ‘opposition’ and not an international fraction within the Comintern made it impossible to develop an international platform which would give the communist left a structure on an international scale.

Nonetheless, considering that ‘[the Third International] is a great step forwards over the Second’,<sup>86</sup> Gorter left for Moscow, with Karl Schröder and Fritz Rasch,<sup>87</sup> in November 1920. After long discussions, and given its refusal to merge with the KPD and the left-Independents, the KAPD became a ‘sympathiser-party’ of the Third International, with only an advisory status. Arthur Goldstein represented the KAPD during sessions of the Moscow ECCI (Executive Committee of the Comintern) after December, and Adolf Dethmann was sent to Moscow in February 1921 to assist Goldstein, as his assistant.

This adherence was welcomed by the minority of the CPH. It proved the falsehood of Wijnkoop’s claim that ‘these people, such as Gorter, Pannekoek, Roland Holst and others have placed themselves outside the ranks of the Comintern of their own accord’.<sup>88</sup> His aim was to show that the leaders of the Dutch left were isolated, even from the KAPD. The latter, he thought, would soon be an opposition. His hopes were quickly dashed.

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85 It was only in 1925 that Onorato Damen (1893–1979) – rather than Bordiga – envisaged the formation of a fraction within the PCI (the *Comitato d'Intesa*). The idea of an ‘international fraction’ was developed by the Italian communist left in exile, following its exclusion from the Comintern in 1926.

86 Gorter, ‘Die KAPD und die dritte Internationale’, *KAZ* (Berlin), No. 162, December 1920. His discussion with Lenin was a huge disappointment for Gorter: ‘I was stupefied to find that Lenin only had Russia on his mind, and considered everything else from the Russian viewpoint. He is not – though this had seemed to me self-evident – the leader of the world revolution; he is Russia’s Washington.’ Doorenbos 1964 pp. 44–52.

87 Schröder has written an account of his journey to Russia with Gorter and Rasch in the form of a novel: *Die Geschichte Jan Beeks* (Berlin: Der Bücherkreis, 1929). Karl Otto Fritz Rasch (13/02/1889–23/02/1954), born in Berlin, tailor, then metalworker. During the war, in Hamburg, in contact with the radical Left in Bremen. Returned to Berlin in 1916 and adhered to the Spartacist League. He was one of the founders (and an excellent organiser too) of the KAPD. Expelled in October 1922, he apparently left politics after 1923. Probably of Jewish origin, he was cruelly tortured in June 1933, like many political opponents and Jews, by the S.A. during the ‘Köpenicker Blutwoche’ (blood-week in Köpenick) in the district of Berlin-Köpenick, where he lived.

88 *De Roode Vaan*, No. 4, 1924, ‘Wijnkoop over de tactische stroomingen in de Derde Internationale’.

## 6 The Communist Left's Arguments against Lenin's Book *Left-Wing Communism, An Infantile Disorder*

When Appel, Jung and Knüfken arrived in Moscow, Lenin in person handed them copies of the manuscript of *Left-Wing Communism, An Infantile Disorder*, which had been written specially for the Second Congress. The response of the Dutch left, which was the theoretical mentor of the KAPD, was not long in coming. The task of replying to Lenin was given to Gorter, in a pamphlet published in Dutch, German and English. Gorter relied heavily on a text by Pannekoek, published in the spring of 1920: *World Revolution and Communist Tactics*.<sup>89</sup> Gorter's pamphlet, written in July 1920 – *Open letter to comrade Lenin, A reply to 'left-wing' communism, an infantile disorder* – served as a basis for argument against Trotsky at a session of the Executive Committee in Moscow in November 1920.<sup>90</sup> It received no real reply. Trotsky brought out an argument that was to be used many times again: how many of you are there defending these positions? He asserted that 'Gorter only speaks for a small group which has no influence over the Western workers' movement'. He tried to ridicule Gorter by presenting him as no more than a sentimental poet: 'Gorter speaks of the revolution like a poet'. Instead of a political response, this was an unbridled attack on Gorter as a person: Gorter's position was 'essentially individualist and aristocratic'. Gorter was 'above all a pessimist who does not believe in the proletarian revolution'. Gorter 'is afraid of the masses', and so on.

All these accusations fail to stand up when we look at Gorter's pamphlet, which, alongside Pannekoek's, remains the strongest critique of the Comintern in 1920.

### 6.1 *The 'Historic Course' and Opportunist Tactics*

In his pamphlet *Left-Wing Communism*, Lenin argued that the 'left' was giving in to 'revolutionary impatience', which was a 'disease of growth'. While this charge could be levelled at the British and German lefts, it was certainly not

89 Although Pannekoek did not consider it necessary to reply to Lenin's text, 'which contains no new arguments', his pamphlet is inseparable from Gorter's, who used large extracts from it. One of the most accurate versions of the German original is Gorter 1974a.

90 *Bulletin Communiste*, No. 34, 18 August 1921, 'Réponse au camarade Gorter', by Trotsky, 24 November 1920. Lenin was more fraternal; at the end of a discussion with Gorter, he said to him 'the future will show which one of us was right'. The speech of Gorter was published only in the *KAZ* (Berlin), Jahrgang 1920–1921, No. 232.

true of the Italian and Dutch.<sup>91</sup> Pannekoek emphasised that ‘the revolution in Western Europe is a long process’.<sup>92</sup> Even before Lenin affirmed at the Second Congress that ‘there is no situation that offers absolutely no way out’ for the bourgeoisie,<sup>93</sup> Pannekoek – in August 1919 – had written that ‘the collapse of capitalism’ did not mean that any reconstruction was impossible: ‘... it is quite possible that capitalism could once again pull itself out of this crisis’.<sup>94</sup> The Dutch left was thus very far from the ultimatumist conception, which did exist within the Comintern, that the revolution was an inevitable phenomenon. Although later on, in 1922, Gorter did – for a short time<sup>95</sup> – adopt the ‘theory of the death-agony’ defended by the Essen tendency of the KAPD, this was not at all the case in 1920.

In his *Open Letter to Comrade Lenin*, Gorter showed that the historic course towards world-revolution in 1920 was greatly dependent on the subjective conditions:

The example of Germany, Hungary, Bavaria, Austria, Poland and the Balkan countries teaches us that crisis and poverty are not enough. The most frightful economic crisis has already arrived, and yet the revolution has not. There has to be another factor that leads to revolution, and whose absence will abort the revolution. *This factor is the spirit of the masses.*<sup>96</sup>

This ‘spirit of the masses’ was defined more precisely as class-consciousness by Pannekoek, who judged Gorter’s formulation to be too idealistic.<sup>97</sup> The

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91 The most ‘impatient’ elements in the left wing of the PSI were those of Gramsci’s *Ordine Nuovo* in Turin. See Gramsci 1978.

92 Pannekoek 1920.

93 Lenin 1973, p. 66.

94 Horner, ‘Der Zusammenbruch des Kapitalismus’ (‘The collapse of capitalism’) in *Die Kommunistische Internationale*, No. 4/5, 1919. In 1919, the organ of the Comintern published texts by the Dutch and British communist lefts; after 1920, there were no more, an obvious change.

95 In a letter to the Dane Andersen-Harild dated 10 April 1926, Gorter criticised the conception of the ‘death-agony of capitalism’ which appeared in the KAPD as ‘a dogma’ (Gorter’s emphasis) ‘instead of being seen as a possibility, or rather a probability’. A clear critique of any ‘revolutionary fatalism’, this letter can be found at the Arbejderbevaegelsens Bibliotek og Arkiv (ABA) in Copenhagen, which contains important material from the German and Danish communist lefts.

96 All the Gorter quotations below come from Gorter 1970.

97 Pannekoek’s article ‘Marxismus und Idealismus’ – published in *Proletarier*, theoretical organ of the KAPD, No. 4, February 1921 – was an indirect response to Gorter.

proletarian vanguards that determined and oriented the revolutionary course were part of this consciousness. Now, as Gorter underlined, ‘with the exception of Germany, a real vanguard does not exist’. The revolutionaries of Western Europe were lagging behind: ‘from this point of view, they are at the same stage as the Bolsheviks were in 1903’.<sup>98</sup> The error of the Russians in the Comintern was to try to make up for this delay through tactical recipes, expressing an opportunist approach, where clarity and an organic process of development were sacrificed in favour of an artificial numerical growth at any cost.

The cause of opportunism in the Third International was the stagnation of the revolution and the weakness of the communist parties. As Pannekoek stressed, it was the defeats in Germany in 1919 and 1920 that had led to a division of the communist movement into two tendencies: a radical tendency which defended ‘new principles’ and sought to provoke a ‘clear and sharp separation’; and an opportunist tendency which ‘puts forwards what unites rather than what separates’. This opportunism was all the more dangerous in that it very often resorted to ‘frenetic declamations’ and could lead to putschism by ‘counting solely on a single big action’. Pannekoek clearly had in mind the attitude of Wijnkoop, who was a ‘rhetorical radical’ *par excellence*, and of the USPD, which in January 1919 had pushed for the insurrection in Berlin. Such a tendency, which ‘is only interested in immediate results, without any concern for the future’ and which ‘remains at the surface of things, instead of going to the root’, suffered from the disease of immediatism.

Thus, the Dutch left turned around Lenin’s accusation that the left was impatient: the real disease of communism, typified by the right, was immediatism, whose corollary was impatience and the search for ‘instant success’.

It is interesting to note that while Gorter and Pannekoek both analysed the roots of immediatism, they saw different causes for it. For Gorter, there was no doubt that the Russian Bolsheviks in 1920 were still deeply revolutionary. They were simply mistaken in the way they wanted to ‘accelerate the Western-European revolution’ by trying to get ‘millions of men to take part in it immediately’. Pannekoek, on the other hand, stressed the fact that the Bolsheviks were playing a conservative role in the International by identifying with the Russian state and its ‘labour-bureaucracy’. This state, from which the International had to be rigorously independent, was trying to find a *modus vivendi* with the West, at the risk of sacrificing the interests of the world-revolution.

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98 Gorter 1970, pp. 485–6.

## 6.2 *The Role of the Communist Party – ‘Masses and Leaders’*

In his pamphlet, Lenin accused the Dutch and German left of having a circle-mentality and of ‘denying the necessity of the party and of party-discipline’. This was true for the Rühle current and the Dutch ‘councilists’ of the 1930s, but it was not at all true for Gorter and Pannekoek in the 1920s.<sup>99</sup> On the contrary, the Dutch left accorded a great importance to the role of the party, both before and during the revolution. But the party was not an end in itself: taking up Rosa Luxemburg’s conception, the Dutch theoreticians declared that communists ‘worked to prepare their own demise’ in a communist society.<sup>100</sup>

The communist party could only be ‘a weapon’ of the revolution, and a ‘pure’ product of it:

The task can only be fulfilled if the Communist Party consists of politically truly conscious and convinced revolutionaries, who are ready for any deed, any sacrifice, and if all the half-baked and wavering elements are kept out by means of its programme, by action, and especially by its tactics themselves.

For only thus, only by preserving this purity, will the party be able to make the class truly revolutionary and communist, through its propaganda, its slogans, and by taking the lead in all actions. The party can take the lead only by being always absolutely pure itself.<sup>101</sup>

The function of the party was not, therefore, simply a programmatic one: it had an active function of propaganda and agitation. Even if the working masses were acting spontaneously, the party did not fall into spontaneism, which would mean lagging behind the action of the masses. The party did not regroup the masses, but was their ‘vanguard’, through its slogans and directives. The party oriented and ‘led’ the struggle. This leading role was not that of a general staff, in which the party commands the class like an army. The party did not command, but rather led the revolution. The revolution could not be decreed, but was the ‘work of the masses’ and ‘broke out spontaneously’. While certain actions by the party could be the starting-point of the revolution ‘this only

99 Lenin, in his polemic against the left, quotes at length from the pamphlet by the Unionist group in Frankfurt, which was close to Rühle. This group, led by Robert Sauer (1888?-?), soon left the KAPD to join the AAUD-E.

100 A formulation taken from Henriëtte Roland Holst, ‘De taak der communistische partij in de proletarische revolutie’, *De Nieuwe Tijd*, 1920, pp. 520–29, 583–96, 610–24, 665–74, 751–63. Text in German in Brendel (ed.) 1972.

101 Gorter 1970, p. 485.



happens rarely' – the decisive factor was the maturation of class-consciousness, which prepared the spontaneous actions of the proletariat. So the revolution did not come from nowhere, but rather was the culmination of a development of consciousness. It was 'psychic factors profoundly rooted in the unconscious mind of the masses' which created the apparent spontaneity of revolutionary activity. The function of the party was precisely 'always to act and speak in a way that can awaken and fortify the class-consciousness of the masses' [*Gorter's emphasis*].<sup>102</sup>

This function of the party determined the structure and functioning of the communist organisation. Instead of regrouping enormous masses, at the price of watering down principles and contracting the opportunist gangrene, the party had to remain a 'nucleus, hard as steel and pure as crystal'.<sup>103</sup> This idea of a nucleus-party implied a rigorous selection of militants. But the Dutch left did not make an eternal virtue out of small numbers: the organic growth of the party could only take place on the basis of a solid nucleus, not of just whatever tactics:

In Western Europe we wish first to build very firm, very clear, and very strong (though at the outset, perhaps quite small) parties, kernels, just as you did in Russia. And once we have those, we will make them bigger. But we always want them to be very firm, very strong, very 'pure'. Only thus can we triumph in Western Europe. Therefore we absolutely reject your tactics, comrade.<sup>104</sup>

Gorter – at the cost of a paradox in his argumentation – got carried away by the polemic against the Comintern Executive, which saw the communist left as a 'sect': 'A sect then, says the Executive Committee ... Quite so, a sect, if you mean by that the initial nucleus of a movement which aims to conquer the world'.<sup>105</sup>

Equally blundering was the argumentation about the centralised functioning of the communist party. Following the KAPD, Gorter counterposed a 'party of leaders' to a 'party of the masses', a 'dialectic' that Pannekoek had rejected. It was evident that the whole left had been traumatised by the October 1919 split in Heidelberg, where the minority, basing itself on the non-representative

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Gorter 1970.

<sup>104</sup> Gorter 1970, p. 446.

<sup>105</sup> Gorter 1970, p. 486.

leadership of the KPD, which was exerting a dictatorship over the party, manoeuvred to exclude the majority. This leadership of Paul Levi, Heinrich Brandler, Ernst Meyer, Wilhelm Pieck and Clara Zetkin was opposed to the will and orientation of the working-class masses in the party. The 'party of leaders' was a party that did not develop an internal democracy, but the dictatorship of a clique, from the top downwards, justifying itself with reference to Lenin's conception of 'iron discipline'. Such parties could only crush any opposition. The 'party of the masses' – and not the mass-party, which Gorter rejected – was built 'from the bottom up' on the basis of the revolutionary workers.

Gorter – and with him, the whole communist left, with the exception of the anarchistic tendencies – did not deny the need for the party to function in a unified, centralised and disciplined manner. Gorter, who is so often wrongly portrayed as the Don Quixote of the 'struggle against leaders', in fact wanted 'the right guides', who try only to determine the 'right path':

In Western Europe we still have, in many countries, leaders of the Second-International type; here we are still seeking the right leaders, those that *do not try to dominate the masses*, that do not betray them; and as long as we do not find these leaders, we want to do everything from below, and through the dictatorship of the masses themselves. If I have a mountain-guide, and he should lead me into the abyss, I prefer to do without him. As soon as we have found the right guides, we will stop this searching. Then mass and leader will really be one.<sup>106</sup>

The implication of these ambiguous formulations was that the KAPD was, momentarily, a party without real leaders, without discipline and without centralisation: which was not at all the case. Gorter seems to postpone to the future what was, in fact, an immediate task. The decapitation of the KPD in 1919, which deprived the party of its best leaders, Luxemburg and Liebknecht, no doubt explained this conception.

In fact, in an intuitive way, Gorter developed an idea which was to become that of the whole communist left, including the Italian left, after the Second World-War. In the revolutionary parties, in contrast to the First and Second Internationals, there would no longer be 'great men' who had a crushing weight

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<sup>106</sup> Gorter 1970, p. 419. The KAPD version added a note to that paragraph, strongly underlining the shape of the new workers' parties: '*Von unten auf*', which could be translated in English by 'rank-and-file' or 'grassroots'.

within the organisation. The character of the revolutionary organisation was more 'anonymous' and more 'collective'.<sup>107</sup> Gorter, remarking on the situation in 1920, in an advanced country like Germany, wrote: 'Have you not noticed, comrade Lenin, that there are no "great" leaders in Germany? They are all very ordinary men'.<sup>108</sup>

The existence of 'great men' in a movement, its personalisation, thus appears as a sign of weakness, and not of strength. It was more typical of under-developed countries where the consciousness and maturity of the masses was at a lower level – hence the need for 'leaders' – than of the industrialised countries. In the latter case, the historic traditions of struggle created a much more homogeneous class-consciousness. The importance of 'leaders' diminished in proportion to the degree of consciousness in more experienced layers of the working class.

### 6.3 *The 'Western-European Revolution' and 'Proletarian Tactics'*

The essential idea defended by the Dutch left was that the tactic put forwards for Western Europe was too 'Russian' and thus could not be applied. As such, Lenin's tactic 'could only lead the Western proletariat to its ruin and to terrible defeats'. Unlike the Russian Revolution, which had been supported by millions of poor peasants, the revolution in the West would be purely proletarian. The proletariat in the advanced countries had no potential allies, neither the peasantry nor the urban petty bourgeoisie. It could only rely on its numbers, its consciousness and its distinct organisation. The proletariat stood alone, and had to face up to all the other classes of society:

The workers in Western Europe are quite alone. It will only be a very small layer of the petty bourgeoisie that will help them. And the latter is not economically significant. The workers must shoulder the whole burden of the revolution on their own. That is the big difference with Russia.<sup>109</sup>

What was true at the social level was even more true at the political level. The political forces that represented the varying interests of the bourgeois and

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<sup>107</sup> The former leader of the Italian Communist Party, Amadeo Bordiga, could thus write in 1953 that 'the revolution will be terrible and anonymous'. This assertion by Bordiga after the war was, however, an *a posteriori* justification of the long anonymity into which he fell between 1930 and 1944: he lived in Naples, with no activity except for his work building houses.

<sup>108</sup> Gorter 1970, p. 429.

<sup>109</sup> Gorter 1970, p. 424.

petty-bourgeois strata were not disunited, but united against the proletariat. In the epoch of imperialism, 'The difference between liberal and clerical, conservative and progressive, big- and petty-bourgeois, disappeared'. This had been shown by the imperialist war, and even more so by the revolution. All the forces of the political apparatus formed a bloc against the revolutionary proletariat; the unity of the proletariat in the revolution was opposed by the unity of bourgeois and petty bourgeois forces, not their division: '... the revolution has made them even far more united in practice. Against the revolution, and consequently against all workers – for the revolution alone can bring actual betterment to all workers –, against the revolution they all stand together without a single "rift"'.<sup>110</sup>

Consequently, the communist left rejected any possibility of a 'tactic' of forming united fronts with these parties, however 'left-wing' they were; it rejected the idea of a 'workers' government' as advocated by the KPD(s) and Lenin. The new historical period, the period of war and revolution, had erased the 'differences' between Social Democracy and the bourgeois parties: 'We might aver, to be sure, that these differences between the Social Democrats and bourgeois in the war and in the revolution have been very slight and have disappeared in most cases!!'.<sup>111</sup>

Any 'workers' government' – Pannekoek insisted – is essentially counter-revolutionary. 'Seeking by all means to avoid the widening of the breach in capitalism's flanks and the development of workers' power, it behaves in an actively counter-revolutionary manner'. The role of the proletariat was not only to fight against it, but to overthrow it in favour of a communist government.

We can see, here, that the left's analysis of the nature of the Social-Democratic parties was still marked by hesitations. Sometimes, Social Democracy seems to be classified as the left wing of the bourgeoisie, sometimes as a 'workers' party'. The tactic of the Dutch left does not seem very clear in Gorter's writings: no support for Social Democracy, whether right- or left-wing, in elections, but a call for joint action, 'for strikes, boycotts, insurrections, street-combat and, above all, for workers' councils and factory-organisations'. This amounted in effect to saying that there could be a united front 'from below' or 'in action' with these organisations.

The change in the historic period had profoundly modified the tactics of the proletariat in Western Europe. These had been simplified, now tending directly towards the revolutionary seizure of power. This did not mean that

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110 Gorter 1970, p. 466.

111 Gorter 1970, p. 470.

the revolution would be easier in the West than in an underdeveloped country like Russia. On the contrary it would be more difficult: against the strength of a 'still-powerful' capitalism, 'the effort demanded of the masses by the situation is much greater than in Russia'. These objective factors (the economic strength of capital, the unity of other classes against the proletariat) were, however, of lesser weight than the unripeness of the subjective factors of the revolution. The Dutch communist left, like the Italian communist left, underlined the enormous weight of 'democratic' prejudices among the proletariat. This 'democratic' heritage was the main force for inertia among the proletariat. It was the principal difference with the Russian Revolution. Pannekoek expressed it in these terms: 'In these countries, the bourgeois mode of production, and the high level of culture that has been linked to it for centuries, have deeply impregnated the way in which the popular masses feel and think.'<sup>112</sup>

The proletarian way of thinking had been infected by this 'culture', which was typically expressed by individualism, by the feeling of belonging to a 'national community', by the veneration of abstract formulae like 'democracy'. The power of the old, outmoded conceptions of Social Democracy, the proletariat's blind belief – expressing its lack of confidence in itself – in the 'leaders who for decades had personified the revolutionary struggle and goals', and finally the material and moral weight of the old forms of organisation, 'gigantic machines created by the masses themselves': all these were negative factors that served to keep 'bourgeois tradition' alive.

It followed that the fundamental question in the advanced countries of Western Europe was the break with bourgeois ideology. This 'spiritual' tradition was a 'factor of infection and paralysis' for the masses. The contradiction between the immaturity of the proletariat, which was too used to reasoning in ideological terms, and the maturity of the objective conditions (the collapse of capitalism) 'can only be resolved by the development of the revolutionary process', by 'the direct experience of the struggle'.

The tactic to be followed by the proletariat in the revolutionary period necessarily had to adapt itself 'to the stage of evolution reached by capitalism'. The methods and forms of struggle changed according to 'each phase' of capitalist evolution. The proletariat thus had to 'overcome the tradition of preceding phases', in the first place the trade-unionist and parliamentary traditions.

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112 Pannekoek 1920, quoted in Bricianer 1969, p. 171.

#### 6.4 *The Union-Question*

Unlike the anarchists, Gorter and Pannekoek did not argue for a timeless rejection of parliamentary and trade-union tactics. What they did say was that after 1914, they were no longer 'weapons of the revolution' (Gorter). From now on, parliaments and unions expressed the 'power of the leaders' over the 'masses' – a somewhat idealist terminology which evaded the fundamental question: was it the internal functioning – 'the leaders' – or the very structure of the unions which had made them inappropriate organs of revolutionary struggle? This terminological confusion was sharply criticised by Lenin.

In *Left-Wing Communism*, Lenin argued that it was necessary to use all available means, even the most underhand, to penetrate the unions and take them over. He put them on the same level as the Zubatov movement<sup>113</sup> in 1905, which the workers had joined: 'We must be able ... – if need be – to resort to various stratagems, artifices, illegal methods, to evasions and subterfuges, only so as to get into the trades-unions, to remain in them, and to carry on communist work within them at all costs.'<sup>114</sup>

The response of the Dutch left was neither moral nor moralistic, but historical. The situation in 1920 was no longer that of 1905. The unions in Germany, the most powerful in Western Europe, had passed over to the bourgeoisie, and the only working-class thing about them was the blood on their hands. It was not just a question of 'bad leaders' – the union's basic structures had participated in the repression of the revolution in Germany in 1919:

Recall in your mind, Comrade [Lenin], how things were in Germany, before and during the war. The trades-unions, the far too weak but only means, were entirely in the hands of the leaders, who used them as dead machines on behalf of capitalism. Then the revolution broke out. The trades-unions were used by the leaders and the masses of members as a weapon against the revolution. It was through their help, through their cooperation, through their leaders, nay, partly even through their members that the revolution was murdered. The Communists saw their own brothers being shot with the cooperation of the trades-unions. Strikes in favour of the revolution were prevented, rendered impossible. Do you

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113 Sergei Zubatov (1863–1917), since 1895 head of the Moscow section of the *Okhrana*, set up trades-unions (as the Mutual-Assistance League of Workers in the Mechanical Industry) in order to push workers into conflicts with the private factory-owners, instead of confrontations with the state. This attempt by the *Okhrana* to entrap the workers was short-lived; the Zubatovist association disappeared in 1903.

114 Lenin 1965, pp. 46–7.

hold it possible, Comrade [Lenin], that under such conditions revolutionary workers should remain in these unions? Especially when these latter are utterly inadequate instruments for the revolution!<sup>115</sup>

In the revolutionary period, there are no longer any 'apolitical' or 'neutral' trades-unions which limit themselves to economic action on behalf of their members. 'Every trade-union, indeed every workers' grouping, plays the role of a political party for or against the revolution'. Unlike the Italian left, which called for a 'trade-union united front' while rejecting the 'political united front', the Dutch left rejected any kind of 'frontism'.

The unions, originally 'the natural organs for the unification of the proletariat', had gradually been transformed into anti-working class organisations. Their bureaucratisation, the domination over the workers by an apparatus of functionaries, corresponded to their semi-fusion with the state. The unions behaved like the capitalist state by using their 'law' (rules, statutes) and naked force to crush any revolt against their 'order'.

The unions also resemble the state and its bureaucracy in this: that, despite the democratic régime they boast of, the union-members have no way of imposing their will on the leaders; an ingenious system of rules and statutes stifles the least revolt before it can threaten the higher levels.

Just like the capitalist state, the unions could not be conquered: they had to be destroyed. Any idea of 'reconquering' the unions or transforming them into 'communist organs' was the worst kind of reformist illusion. In several places, Gorter compared Lenin to Bernstein. Lenin's tactic of forming a communist

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115 Gorter 1970, pp. 434–5.

On the repression carried out by the German trades-unions along with the *Freikorps* in January 1919, see KPD 1929, p. 278. The Social-Democratic Party and union-functionary Baumeister, and the editor of *Vorwärts*, Erich Kuttner (1887–1942), formed the Reichstag regiment composed of Social Democrats, who, alongside Noske's *Freikorps*, took part in the bloody crushing of the revolutionary workers. From 1921 to 1933, Kuttner was an SPD MP. In February 1933, he went underground, and was soon forced to emigrate to the Netherlands; despite his past, he became member of the *Gruppe Revolutionäre Sozialisten* (the left-socialists of *Neu Beginnen*) in Amsterdam; he took part in the Spanish Civil War as a correspondent; wrote studies on German cultural and Dutch social history. Discovered by the Gestapo in 1942, he was sent to Mauthausen, where he was executed. He is best known today for his book on the Dutch revolutionary proletariat during the 1566 Dutch Revolt: *Das Hungerjahr 1566* (published in Dutch translation in 1949: *Het Hongerjaar 1566*). In the writing of this book, he used the first rough Marxist outline on the question written by Sam de Wolff, from 1906, which was published in *De Nieuwe Tijd*, 'Het proletariaat in de begin jaren van de strijd tegen Spanje'.

opposition in the unions was a nonsense, because 'the bureaucracy knows perfectly well how to strangle an opposition before it becomes a threat'. In the absurd hypothesis of the opposition taking over the leadership by chasing out the 'bad leaders', it would then start behaving exactly like them: 'Replace the bureaucracy of the old unions with new personnel and, in no time at all, you will see that the latter will take on the same features which elevated them, distanced them and detached them from the masses. 99 percent of them will become tyrants, serving alongside the bourgeoisie.'<sup>116</sup>

It was not, therefore, the content of the union-organisation that was bad ('bad leaders' and 'labour-aristocracy', in Lenin's conception) but the very form of organisation, which 'reduced the masses to impotence'. The revolution was thus not a question of injecting a new, revolutionary content into the old forms of proletarian organisation. In the view of the communist left, form could not be separated from revolutionary content. Form was not a matter of indifference.<sup>117</sup> In this sense, the revolution was also a question of the form of organisation, as much as a question of content – of the development of class-consciousness.

This form could only be, in a revolutionary period, the workers' councils, or more precisely, the factory-organisations. The latter were a step beyond the corporatism of the old professional unions and were the only basis for the unity of the working class. Their 'men of confidence', in contrast to the practice of the unions, were recallable at any time. On this point, the Dutch left was simply following the Russian experience, where it was the factory-based

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<sup>116</sup> Gorter 1974a, p. 37.

William Gallacher was leader of the Clyde Workers' Committee (CWC), and in his role as CWC chairman was imprisoned for sedition in 1916 and again for incitement to riot after the events of Bloody Friday in 1919. At the Second Congress of the Comintern, he illustrated from his own experience as a worker the vacuity of the tactic of 'entryism' in the old unions: 'We have worked in the British unions for twenty-five years without managing to revolutionise them from the inside. Every time we succeeded in getting one of our comrades to be a union-leader, it turned out that, instead of there being a change of tactic, the union corrupted our comrade ... It is thus as senseless to talk about conquering the unions as about conquering the capitalist state'. Komintern 1921b, pp. 627–9. Later on, Gallacher renounced his revolutionary positions. He was elected as Communist MP for West Dunfermline in 1935 and remained one until 1950. From 1943 to 1965, he was the official 'president' of the CPGB.

<sup>117</sup> This is not what the 'Bordigist' current thought in the 1970s. In *Programme communiste*, No. 56, 1972 ('Marxisme contre idéalisme, ou le parti contre les sectes'), the 'Bordigists' said, 'Marxism never theorises a form of organisation as being "the" revolutionary form that, by nature, will serve the insurrection and the seizure of power. In 1871 it was the Commune; in 1917, the soviets; in Italy, the "labour-centres" could have done the same job'.



councils, and not the unions, who had carried out the revolution. However, certain statements by the Dutch left gave rise to ambiguities and revealed a lack of coherence:

- while preaching the destruction of the unions, it asserted that the councils would provide ‘the basis for new unions’;
- it confused the German *Unionen* with the factory-assemblies that were part of the structure of the workers’ councils;
- it vaunted the example of the American IWW, a form of revolutionary syndicalism, and the British shop-stewards’ movement, despite rejecting any trade-union form;
- it advocated a form of factoryism in which the factory was everything: ‘the revolution in the West can only be organised on the basis of the factories and in the factories’; the question of forming territorial organs that go beyond the framework of the factory was not raised.

On these questions, the Dutch left did not get to the root of the trade-union problem. It was a question of establishing whether the ‘decline of capitalism’ proclaimed by the Third International meant that durable reforms were no longer possible, whether the kind of gains won by the reformist unions in the nineteenth century were still possible after the war. If this were the case, then purely economic and defensive workers’ organisations would be emptied of their class-aims and, under the pressure of the state, would be led into class-collaboration. At best, they would disappear, like the *Unionen* (see below). The essential problem was seeing whether permanent defensive organs were still possible. In fact, it was much later on that the German-Dutch left was to reject the possibility of forming any permanent economic organisations (see below).

### 6.5 *The Rejection of ‘Revolutionary Parliamentarism’*

Unlike Bordiga’s current, the Dutch left had for a long time considered the question of participation in elections as a secondary one. This is why it made a rather unconvincing distinction between a ‘material’ bourgeois power incarnated in the unions and a ‘spiritual’ bourgeois power incarnated in parliaments. However, it did define parliamentarism as an active material force, a counter-revolutionary force that was a real barrier to class-consciousness. In any case, in the Marxist definition, ideology appears as a material force.

In fact, electoral illusions are a pernicious poison for the working class.<sup>118</sup> They tie it to reformism and keep it tied to the parliamentary leaders who have

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<sup>118</sup> The same argumentation can be found in Bordiga’s ‘Theses on Parliamentarism’: ‘... demo-

'led them into war, into the alliance with capitalism'. They paralyse revolutionary activity and encourage passivity:

As such, parliamentary activity is the paradigm of struggles in which only the leaders are actively involved and in which the masses themselves play a subordinate role. It consists in individual deputies carrying on the main battle; this is bound to arouse the illusion among the masses that others can do their fighting for them. People used to believe that leaders could obtain important reforms for the workers in Parliament; and the illusion even arose that parliamentarians could carry out the transformation to socialism by Acts of Parliament ... *Parliamentarianism inevitably tends to inhibit the autonomous activity by the masses that is necessary for revolution* ... thus, so long as the working class thinks it sees an easier way out through others acting on its behalf, leading agitation from a high platform, taking decisions, giving signals for action, making laws – the old habits of thought and the old weaknesses will make it hesitate and remain passive<sup>119</sup>

It followed that 'revolutionary' action by parliamentary deputies, even communist ones, had become impossible. The days of a Liebknecht or a Höglund (in Sweden) who could use the parliamentary tribune were definitively over. Before and during the war, and thus before the revolution, these two models of 'revolutionary parliamentarism' could exercise a 'great influence'; but since the Russian Revolution, their action 'had had no effect'. Even if the proletariat were to send more Liebknechts to Parliament, instead of the likes of Levi and Wijnkoop, the result would be negative: 'a large part of the masses would be satisfied with their speeches and thus their presence in Parliament would have a damaging effect'.<sup>120</sup>

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cracy constitutes a means of indirect defence of the capitalist state by spreading among the masses the illusion that they can realise their emancipation through a peaceful process and that the proletarian state can also take a parliamentary form, with rights of representation for the bourgeois minority. The result of this democratic influence over the proletarian masses has been the corruption of the socialist movement in the Second International in the domain of theory as well as in the domain of action'. This similarity between the position of the Italian and Dutch-German lefts was denied later on by the Bordigists in a particularly sectarian way: '... the Marxist left and the KAPD crossed paths over abstentionism, but only as on the field of battle, like two opposed armies' (*Programme communiste*, No. 53–4, 'Gorter, Lénine et la Gauche', Paris, October 1971–March 1972).

119 Pannekoek 1920, from translation in Smart 1978.

120 Gorter 1974a.

However, on this point, the German-Dutch left did not touch on the real problem of the function of parliamentarism since the war. The war had demonstrated that the centre of political gravity had moved from Parliament to the government, which could place itself above the clash of bourgeois interests and become the real decision-making centre. In this new historic period, which was later analysed as the period of 'state-capitalism' (see below), elections appeared as a way of diverting the workers from their revolutionary course by preserving all kinds of mystification about 'bourgeois democracy'. This question of the function of parliamentarism went well beyond the problem of 'leaders' substituting themselves for the activity of the masses.

Because it failed to analyse the new function of parliamentarism in depth, the Dutch left did not really respond to the core of Lenin's arguments. It mainly criticised the latter's 'pragmatic' arguments. The first of these was that it would be 'useful' to carry out propaganda in Parliament 'in order to win over the non-communist workers and petty-bourgeois elements'. But, as Gorter stressed, this was a fallacious argument, since the latter 'ordinarily learned nothing through their newspapers' about the content of the intervention of workers' deputies. They could learn much more about revolutionary positions through communist 'meetings, pamphlets and newspapers'.

Lenin's second argument – using Parliament in order to exploit the divisions between bourgeois parties, and even to make 'compromises' with certain of them – was the most dangerous, even if he was only referring circumstantially to the case of Britain. Lenin's tactic was, in effect, an attempt to make up for the lack of a real workers' party in Britain: 'in the interest of the revolution, to give a certain parliamentary support'<sup>121</sup> to Labour, in order to weaken the bourgeoisie. But, as Gorter replied, the divisions within the bourgeois political apparatus were 'insignificant'. This tactic could only lead to the pitiful example of Paul Levi, who, during the Kapp Putsch of March 1920, proclaimed his 'loyal opposition' to the Social-Democratic government. This policy, instead of exposing the unity of the whole bourgeoisie against the proletariat, merely instilled the belief that it was still possible to make compromises 'with the bourgeoisie in the revolution'. Any parliamentarist policy inevitably led to a policy of compromise with the bourgeoisie, culminating in the formation of 'workers' governments'. The result was a political regression for the revolutionary movement: in a period in which 'reformism' had become impracticable, Lenin's tactic would lead the proletariat back to the reformist terrain of the Second International. And, instead of breaking with the old democratic system, the

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121 Lenin 1965, Chapter IX, 'Left-Wing Communism in Great Britain'.

communist parties would be transformed into legalistic organs regressing back towards social democracy: 'the Communist Party is changing into a parliamentary formation, with a legal status identical to that of the others, plunged in the same quarrels, a new version of the old Social Democracy, but with extremist slogans'.

The Dutch left took its arguments no further. For lack of historical experience, it did not deal with the problem of whether it were possible for the communist parties to become a new version of the Social Democracy. Furthermore, if the communist parties did become 'social-democratic', in the manner of the German SPD, this could only mean one thing: that these parties had become parties of the left wing of the ruling class.

### 6.6 'The Meridian-Argument'

The whole argument of the Dutch left was based on Western Europe. Did this mean that the tactics of the left-communists did not apply in the economically backward countries? Was the tactic of supporting national-liberation struggles – elaborated since the Baku Congress in September 1920 – valid for these countries?<sup>122</sup> The response of the Dutch left was somewhat contradictory. Gorter and Pannekoek differed in their analyses. Gorter seemed to see the possibility of proletarian revolution only in Western Europe and – stretching a point – in North America. Trotsky reproached Gorter, not without justification, for using the 'meridian-argument', envisaging two tactics based simply on economic geography.<sup>123</sup> Indeed, Gorter did set up a rigid and rather simplistic frontier between two tactical possibilities:

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122 A complete record of the Baku Congress appears in Riddell 1993. This congress was held at the same time as the Soviet government began to support Mustafa Kemal in Turkey, who did not wait long before massacring the Turkish Communists. The congress, regrouping more than 2,000 delegates, was the occasion for a nationalist, even Islamist demagoguery, on the part of Zinoviev: 'Comrades! Brothers! The time has now come when you can set about organising a true people's holy war against the robbers and oppressors. The Communist International turns today to the peoples of the East and says to them: *Brothers, we summon you to a holy war*, in the first place against British imperialism!' (Baku Congress of the Peoples of the East, First Session, September 1). The interests of the Russian state were beginning to predominate over those of the Communist International.

123 *Bulletin communiste*, No. 34, 18 August 1921, 'Réponse au camarade Gorter' by Trotsky. Gorter – seconded by Schröder (pseudonyms: Karl Wolf, or Zech, then Jan Beek) – made an hour and a half long speech to the Executive. Despite his repeated protests, his speech was not published by the Comintern's Executive. Karl Schröder made mention of his trip to Moscow with Gorter (the Dutch Heemskerck) in his autobiographical novel *Die Geschichte Jan Beeks*, Berlin, 1929.

If you go from the east of Europe to the west, at a particular point you cross an economic frontier. It goes from the Baltic to the Mediterranean, more or less from Danzig to Venice. This is a line which separates two worlds. To the west of this line, industrial, commercial and bank-capital, united in financial capital and developed to the highest degree, rules almost absolutely. Agrarian capital is subordinated to this capital, or has already been unified with it. This capital is highly organised and is concentrated in the most solid governments and states in the world. To the east of this line there is neither this immense development of capital concentrated in industry, commerce, transport and banks, nor its absolute rule, and consequently there are no solidly constructed modern states.<sup>124</sup>

In fact, this 'meridian-argument' mixed up two different problems. Like Marx and Engels,<sup>125</sup> Gorter firmly believed that the epicentre of the world-revolution would be in Western Europe: from this epicentre, the revolutionary earthquake would reverberate around the world. Unlike Trotsky at a later date, Gorter was never in favour of building a 'United Socialist States of Europe', which was a sort of pan-Europeanism, even a kind of European national communism. For Gorter, as for the Bolsheviks, the revolution could only be worldwide.

The second problem was that of the unity of the worldwide tactics of the proletariat on the basis of new principles (the dictatorship of the councils, the boycott of elections, the rejection of trade-unionism) established by revolutionary experience. Gorter seemed to think that Lenin's tactic was fine for Russia, but not for Europe. In fact, Gorter showed that the revolution in Russia had been carried out against parliament, and without the unions, by basing itself on the factory-committees and soviets. And it was 'only after the revolution' that the alliance with the peasantry was made.

The weakness of Gorter's argument did not lie in his insistence on the decisive role of the Western proletariat in the world-revolution, but in his lack of insistence on the unity of principles and tactics between the developed and the underdeveloped countries. It was only later, in 1923 (see below) that Gorter was to argue that the left-communist tactic was also valid in the underdeveloped

<sup>124</sup> Gorter 1970, p. 432.

<sup>125</sup> As Engels wrote in his 1847 *Principles of Communism*: 'The communist revolution will not merely be a national phenomenon but must take place simultaneously in all civilised countries, that is to say, at least in England, America, France and Germany ... It will have a powerful impact on the other countries of the world and will radically alter the course of development which they have followed up to now, while greatly stepping up its pace. It is a universal revolution and accordingly must have a universal range.'

countries of Asia, where the proletariat had to be rigorously independent of all bourgeois parties and ally itself with the proletariat of the developed countries, to form a single unity.

Pannekoek's position was much less ambivalent. In 1920 he had criticised Gorter quite strongly, if not directly: 'To consider the world-revolution solely from a Western-European standpoint is to prevent oneself from grasping its universal significance'.<sup>126</sup>

Pannekoek insisted more than Gorter on the unity of the revolutionary struggle across all 'meridians', across all continents:

It falls to the workers of Western Europe and the USA, in unity with the multitudes of Asia, to carry through to the end their struggle to do away with the capitalist system. This struggle is only just beginning. When the German Revolution has passed a crucial stage and has linked up with Russia, when the struggles of the revolutionary masses break out in Britain and America, when India is on the verge of insurrection, when communism extends from the Rhine to the Indian Ocean, then the world-revolution will enter its most violent phase.<sup>127</sup>

But on the other hand, in 1920, with the fresh defeat of the German proletariat, Pannekoek showed more scepticism about the capacity of the proletariat of Western Europe to be the focus of the world-revolution. He even came out with lyrical declamations about 'the great revolt of Asia against Western-European capital concentrated in Britain', which would join up with the proletarian revolution in the West and make Moscow the 'capital of a new humanity'.<sup>128</sup> This enthusiasm and fascination for the 'multitudes' of Asia prefigured the Baku Congress where sermons were preached about the 'revolutionary holy war' of the East against the West. Pannekoek did not go that far, but he went close enough when he more-or-less supported national-liberation movements in Asia which he hoped – despite their nationalism, which Gorter had pointed out – would 'adopt a communist mentality and a communist programme'. This enthusiasm for the 'multitudes of Asia', which was untypical of the scientific Pannekoek, was short-lived. In 1921, the break with the Comintern – when the Russian question was posed by Kronstadt and the NEP – put an end to Pannekoek's hopes of making Moscow the 'capital of a new humanity'.

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<sup>126</sup> Pannekoek 1920, translation from Bricianer 1969, p. 194.

<sup>127</sup> Bricianer 1969, p. 197.

<sup>128</sup> Bricianer 1969, p. 198.

It took much courage for Pannekoek, and above all Gorter, to criticise Lenin, who was already the object of a veritable cult in the Comintern. Accused of childishness, both of them – as spokesmen of the Dutch, German and British left-communists – demonstrated great maturity, and the maturation of their theory. The Dutch left's *Open Letter to Comrade Lenin* remains left-communism's only systematic, argued and solid response to the positions developed by Lenin's current.

## Gorter, the KAPD and the Foundation of the Communist Workers' International (1921–7)

In January 1921, the recognition of the KAPD as a 'sympathiser-party' of the Third International with a 'permanent representative on the Executive',<sup>1</sup> seemed to be a victory for the policy of opposition carried out by Gorter and Pannekoek. It was beginning to be possible for the Comintern and left-communism to work in common. At least that is how it seemed, reading Zinoviev, when he wrote in the name of the Executive Committee:

The core of the KAPD contains some genuinely revolutionary workers. This party has taken a great step towards communism recently by excluding Laufenberg, Wolffheim and Otto Rühle from its ranks. The KAPD criticises our German comrades. This is no misfortune. The KPD is not in any

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1 The representative of the KAPD was Arthur Goldstein (pseudonym: Stahl). Born in Lipine (Silesia) on 18 March 1887, he was a journalist with a doctorate in law. A member of the SPD in 1914, he joined the USPD in 1917. In opposition in the KPD in 1919, he was a founding member of the KAPD. Within the latter he led a stubborn battle against national Bolshevism, and wrote a pamphlet against it: see Goldstein 1920. A delegate on the Comintern's Executive from November 1920 until the end of March 1921, he returned to Germany to edit the KAP organ in the Ruhr, *Klassenkampf*. He was part of the Schröder clan, and through this was a member of the KAI Bureau of Information, before the split of March 1922. After this, he rapidly became a collaborator of Paul Levi and of the periodical *Unser Weg*. Levi had him enter the SPD 'to form an opposition'. At the end of the 1920s, he formed the clandestine *Rote Kämpfer* group together with Schröder, Reichenbach, and Schwab, who left the KAPD claiming to take up its original positions. He was exiled to France after 1933, where he tried to form an organisation of the RK. He may have been the co-author, using the pseudonym A. Lehmann, of the article 'The Communist Workers' Groups', and of 'The economic, social and political causes of fascism' (*Masses*, No. 11, Paris, November 1933). In Paris he had close relationship with the Trotskyist IKD group ('*Unser Wort*'), to which he adhered in 1933. He left one year later together with Erwin Ackerknecht (1906–1988) and Paul Kirchoff, rejecting the entryism in the social democracy advocated by Leon Trotsky in his essays on *The French Turn* in June 1934. He was captured by the Gestapo around June 1943. Deported with transport 55 from Drancy Camp (near Paris) to Auschwitz Birkenau Lager on 23/06/1943, he was assassinated on 25/06/1943. (See: Peter Berens, *Trotzkisten gegen Hitler*, ISP, Köln 2007, p. 199; and <http://www.yadvashem.org/>).



case immune from errors: we only need to remember its attitude during the Kapp Putsch and during the last insurrection of the Berlin electricians ...<sup>2</sup>

The joint work between the left-communists and the Comintern was of short duration. It did not survive the 1921 March Action in Central Germany. The international environment was becoming more and more unfavourable, not only with the very clear retreat of the world-revolution, but, above all, in relation to the politics of the Russian state. The foreign policy of this state, the events at Kronstadt and, finally, the politics of the Comintern in Germany were to be signposts towards the final break that happened at the Third Congress of the Comintern. Preceded by the expulsion of the minority from the CPH, even before the Third Congress, the expulsion of the KAPD in September 1921 sounded the death-knell of an international opposition in the Comintern. However, it was the Dutch communist left that took the lead of the international opposition even outside the International. Under the guidance of Gorter, but not of Pannekoek, a Communist Workers' International (KAI) was formed. But this ultimately became an adventure without any future. It could only precipitate the decline in the communist-left tendency in the Netherlands, as in Germany, before the rise, at the end of the 1920s, of the Group of Communist Internationalists (GIC).

As the centre of gravity of the Dutch current moved to Germany, and even to Britain and Bulgaria, the Netherlands became the theoretical and political centre of the international left-communist movement.

## 1      **The Retreat of the World-Revolution – The 1921 ‘Kronstadt Tragedy’ and the March Action**

The NEP (New Economic Policy) in the economic sphere, applied in Russia after March 1921, was preceded by a diplomatic NEP on the part of the Russian state. It sought to make alliances with various capitalist states. Through the mediation of Karl Radek, imprisoned in Germany, from autumn 1919 contacts were made with the *Reichswehr* and its generals,<sup>3</sup> but also with the millionaire Walther Rathenau, with the aim of investigating the possibility of a military

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2 Letter from the Executive Committee of 15 January 1921, published in *Die Aktion*, No. 13–14, Berlin, April 1921.

3 See Carr 1952.

and economic alliance between Germany and Russia. As early as October 1919, Radek stated clearly: 'The possibility of a peace between capitalist states and proletarian states is not a utopia'.<sup>4</sup> A *de facto* alliance directed against the Treaty of Versailles and the Allies was established in 1920, during the Russian-Polish War; Germany declared its 'neutrality', which meant the prohibition of the transport of Allied munitions for Poland across its territory. Commercial agreements with Allied countries were sought and obtained: one was concluded between Great Britain and Russia on 16 March 1921, at the same time as the events in Kronstadt. The *modus vivendi* between the capitalist world and the Soviet state, denounced previously by Pannekoek, slowly became a reality. The contours of the Treaty of Rapallo on 16 April 1922 were beginning to emerge.

But most disturbing was the complete submission of the Comintern to the national aims of the Russian state. The latter tended to make its interests predominate over the revolutionary interests of the International. Turkey provides a striking example of this antagonism. From 1919, contacts were made in Berlin, with Radek again the intermediary, between the Russian government and the Turkish-nationalist leader, Enver Pasha, who later attended the Baku Congress. Friendly relations were established with Mustafa Kemal from 1920, leading to the signature of an agreement with Turkey on 16 March 1921. Mustafa Kemal not only crushed the peasant-movement, which was supported by the Comintern, but he also executed the entire leadership of the Turkish Communist Party, who had been trained in Germany by the Spartakists and were hostile to all nationalism. This massacre did not hinder the good relations between the Russian state and Turkey.<sup>5</sup> For the first time, it was shown that governments seeking good diplomatic relations with Russia could assassinate and outlaw revolutionary militants, members of the Comintern, without forfeiting their good relations with the Russian state whose policies were, in principle, subordinated to those of the Comintern. These events, unfolding in January 1921, were the direct consequence of the Second Congress's acceptance of support for so-called 'national-liberation' movements.

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4 Radek 1919, pp. 11–12. Radek went even further in 'advocating a *modus vivendi* with the capitalist states'. See also Fayet 2004, pp. 253–315.

5 In August 1920 the Soviet government delivered 400 kilograms of gold to Mustafa Kemal; arms followed shortly afterwards. To appear radical, the Kemal government formed an 'official' CP, composed of a whole selection of generals, ministers and high functionaries (see Dumont 1983).

### 1.1 *The Tragedy of Kronstadt (March 1921)*

More than foreign policy, the events of Kronstadt brought to light the growing divorce between the Russian state and the proletariat. Indeed, strikes were escalating in February 1921 in the Petrograd factories, which were always the heart of the Russian Revolution. They were directed as much against food-rationing as against the economic and social policy of the state and the Bolshevik party.

Despite the allegations that the strikes were fomented by the Mensheviks, the Social Revolutionaries or the anarchists – the majority of them were, in fact, in prison – the movement assumed a spontaneous character, without leaders or organisation. It extended to all the large factories, including the Putilov factories, the main bastion of the 1917 Revolution. Faced with this, Zinoviev and the Petrograd Bolsheviks responded with repressive measures: dispersal of demonstrations by the cadets (*koursantis*); lock-outs of factories on strike; loss of ration-cards for strikers; institution of martial law; widespread arrests; immediate executions in the case of political assemblies; and surveillance of workers in the factories by troops of armed Bolsheviks.<sup>6</sup> These measures had the effect of crystallising and politicising the workers' latent discontent, which had been growing for several months. The political demands included abolition of martial law; liberation of all those imprisoned; freedom of assembly, press and speech for workers; free elections to strike-committees and soviets: all the demands directed against 'the dictatorship of the party' and the Cheka showed the antagonism between the proletariat and the state upon which the Bolsheviks were based. They were an appeal for workers' democracy and the revitalisation of the soviets which had been absorbed by the state and the Bolshevik party.

In the midst of this situation, the sailors and workers of the Kronstadt repair-yards sent delegations to the Petrograd factories. The result was that the Kronstadt sailors and workers took up the demands of the Petrograd workers and broadened them: re-election of the soviets by secret ballot; organisation outside the Bolshevik party of a conference of workers, soldiers and sailors of the province; freedom of the press and organisation for anarchists and left-socialists. Sending Kalinin and Kuzmin – whose attitude was provocative – to Kronstadt could only serve to bring things to a head. The result was the formation of the Provisional Revolutionary Committee (PRC) representing the whole population of the island, at the same time as the workers of Petrograd went back to work under the effects of the terror.

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6 See Avrich 1970; Berkman 1982; Mett 1993; and an impressive collection of Russian texts, Vinogradov and Kozlov (eds.) 1999.

Armed confrontation between the Bolsheviks and the Kronstadt sailors became inevitable. The latter were described as counter-revolutionary 'White Guards', in the pay 'of the French capitalists'.<sup>7</sup> Their families in Petrograd were taken hostage; they themselves were threatened with being 'shot down like partridges'. Finally Trotsky, who the insurgents called 'Junker Trotsky', or 'blood-thirsty Trotsky',<sup>8</sup> gave the order to crush Kronstadt on 7 March, leaving the sailors and workers no hope of survival: 'I am giving the immediate order to prepare to crush the revolt. The insurgents will be executed'.<sup>9</sup> With the slogan

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7 This claim that the Kronstadt insurgents were led by the 'White Guard' was based on the presence of an old Tsarist general, who was serving in the fleet. But Tukhachevsky was also an old Tsarist officer. At the end of 1919, the official figures showed the integration of 100,000 Tsarist officers out of the total of 500,000 in the Red Army. The Kronstadt insurgents refused to follow the military advice of the old Tsarist general, Aleksandr Kozlovsky (1864–1940), who officially commanded the artillery as a 'military specialist', and was able to escape to Finland after the defeat. It is certain, however, that the Whites did not remain inactive. They attempted to offer their 'services' by sending emissaries. The insurgents removed the officers from command during the revolt. Thus Bukharin said, not without a certain Jesuit manner, at the Third Congress of the Comintern: 'Who said that Kronstadt was White? No-one. For our ideas, for the task which we have to fulfil, we have been forced to repress the revolt of our misguided brothers. We cannot consider the sailors of Kronstadt as our enemies. We love them as real brothers, our flesh and blood' (quoted by Avrich 1970, p. 132). Paul Avrich (1931–2006) was a historian who spent most of his life on work vital in preserving the history of the anarchist movement in Russia and the USA.

8 Kronstadt *Izvestia*, No. 5, 7 March 1921: from the French translation published in 1969 by Béliabaste, Paris. The Kronstadters made a clear distinction between Lenin and Trotsky. They believed that Lenin, being ill, had fallen under the influence of Zinoviev and Trotsky. In No. 12, on 14 March, the Kronstadters acknowledged their disappointment in Lenin, when he had declared at the Tenth Congress of the Russian Communist Party that 'the movement was for the soviets but against the dictatorship of the Bolsheviks' and that it was a 'counter-revolution of a new kind'. They thought, like the Russian workers, that 'Lenin was different from Trotsky and Zinoviev'. They still 'trusted in him' (Kronstadt *Izvestia*, No. 12, 14 March 1921). They concluded from it that Lenin was finally led to 'slander' them, like Trotsky and Zinoviev. But Lenin was 'sincere', although sinking into 'confusion'.

9 This radio message from Trotsky is taken from the 1969 Béliabaste translation. We have not been able to verify the Russian text of *Izvestia* No. 5 of 7 March. Ida Mett indicates not that the insurgents would be 'executed', but rather 'crushed by armed force': 'At the same time I give the order to prepare everything necessary to crush the revolt and the rebels by force of arms. The responsibility for the disasters which will befall the civilian population lies entirely on the heads of the White Guard insurgents' (Mett 1993 pp. 47–8). Finally, Paul Avrich gave the following translation of Trotsky's ultimatum: – co-signed by Sergei Kamenev (1881–1936), commander-in-chief of the Red Army and Mikhail Tukhachevsky (1893–1937), both former Tsarist officers who became commanders in the Red Army – 'I give at the same time the order

‘victory or death’, the sailors and the workers, who had all been armed, fought with desperate energy. The government had mobilised tens of thousands of soldiers – of whom the majority came from Central Asia, and so were more easily swayed by official propaganda – joined by members of the Bolshevik party, including those of the Workers’ Opposition.<sup>10</sup> Behind them were the Chekists, who shot the numerous deserters and fired on troops who went over to the Kronstadt insurgents. Tukhachevsky’s<sup>11</sup> troops finally defeated the insurgents; tens of thousands of sailors and workers were shot; the survivors were sent to prison or to the camps where they perished.<sup>12</sup>

The programme of the Kronstadt insurgents was not sufficiently clear to grasp the attention of left-communists. It certainly rejected any idea of the Constituent Assembly and any return to the past; it simply wanted, in a confused way, a dictatorship of the councils without parties of any sort, and not a dictatorship exercised by a single party. However, this idea of a ‘dictatorship of the class’, as opposed to the ‘dictatorship of the party’ was to be developed at the end of 1921 by the Dutch and German left-communists, above all by the KAPD. By contrast, the Kronstadters’ call for a ‘third revolution’ remained very vague

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to prepare the crushing of the mutiny and the reduction of the mutineers by armed force. The responsibility for the sufferings which could result from it for the peaceful population falls down entirely on the head of the counter-revolutionary mutineers. This warning is the last’ (Avrich 1970 p. 141). If there is a distinction to make between ‘executing’ and ‘crushing the mutineers by armed force’, it is a quite minor one, which does not remove any of Trotsky’s responsibility for crushing the Kronstadt uprising. It is well-known that the result was the immediate shooting of insurgents, or, in the ‘best-case scenario’, their death in concentration-camps. Later, Trotsky tried to deny his own responsibility, when it was recalled in the 1930s that he had been one of the main agents of the bloody repression. With an obvious lie, Trotsky claimed in 1938 that he ‘had not taken the smallest personal role in the pacification [sic] of the Kronstadt uprising or in the repression which followed it’ (Quoted by *The New Internationalist*, August 1938, pp. 249–50). At that time, Trotsky was involved in a policy of alliance with the Spanish anarchists, and he did not welcome the memory of this inglorious past.

10 Alexandra Kollontai declared that the members of the Opposition would be the first to volunteer to crush the Kronstadt revolt: Avrich 1970, p. 175.

11 In 1939, the Stalinist régime accused Tukhachevsky of being responsible for the Kronstadt insurrection!

12 It is highly significant that the insurgents, who had imprisoned a small minority of Communists who were hostile to the uprising, used no violence against them. All violence was excluded in the insurgents’ camp: ‘[Kronstadt does not want] to imitate Petrograd, for it considers a similar act, even carried out in a fit of desperate hatred, is the most shameful and cowardly from all points of view. History has not yet seen such proceedings’. From *Izvestia*, 7 March 1921.

and offered no perspective. The idea, besides, of 'giving the peasants complete freedom of action on their land' but 'without using any wage-labour' could only arouse the hostility of Gorter and the KAPD.<sup>13</sup> They were hostile to all concessions to the peasantry, which they identified with the *kulaks*.

In fact, at first the KAPD supported the official thesis of a plot against Soviet Russia. Claiming that the French boats were in Reval to support the insurrection in Russia – which was false – they declared: 'The counter-revolutionary Russian emigrants are returning to Russia, and Count Wrangel is preparing in Hungary with the aim of providing military support'.<sup>14</sup> The action of the insurgents was defined as anti-communist and counter-revolutionary: 'The exact knowledge of Russian conditions permits the counter-revolutionaries to provoke an insurrection, which, in its first phase, was of the same kind as a third revolution. During this struggle, with the demand for the Constituent Assembly, the imprint of an uprising directed against communism becomes clearly apparent.'

Nevertheless, the KAPD's organ clearly shows the context: hunger and 'discontent with the dictatorship of the party and the Soviet bureaucracy'.<sup>15</sup>

It took the detailed account of the KAPD delegates in Moscow, and in particular that of Arthur Goldstein<sup>16</sup> – assisted by Adolf Dethmann – who represented the party on the Executive of the Comintern, to change the attitude of the left-communists. Goldstein gave a more exact appreciation of the proletarian meaning of Kronstadt:

The antagonism between the proletariat and the Soviet government has been sharpened since the outbreak of food-riots in Moscow and Petrograd: the Soviet government took very severe measures, which were no different from those adopted by a capitalist state. I should add that the

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13 Resolution from the ship *Petropavlovsk*, 28 February 1921; quoted by Avrich 1970, pp. 75–6. It is certain that the weight of the small peasants was felt by the sailors, because two-thirds were of peasant-origin in 1921. But this social composition was not very different from that of the Kronstadt sailors in 1918.

14 KAZ Berlin, No. 177.

15 KAZ Berlin, No. 179, 'Die Offensive gegen Russland beginnt!'

16 Goldstein, soon replaced by B. Reichenbach (1888–1975; pseudonym: Johannes Seemann), was in contact with the Russian Workers' Opposition in Moscow. It was he who brought Kollontai's manuscript of the Workers' Opposition to the West via a special KAPD courier. It was immediately translated into German and Dutch and produced by the KAPD and the organ of the opposition in the Netherlands, *De Kommunistische Arbeider*. The Solidarity group published an English version in September 1968.

Kronstadt uprising ought to be interpreted as a symptom of the antagonism between the proletariat and the Soviet government. The history of the Kronstadt insurrection is not only that of foreign capital which played a role against the Soviet government, but also the fact that the great majority of the Russian proletariat were, from the bottom of their hearts, on the side of the Kronstadt insurgents.<sup>17</sup>

This attitude of the KAPD organs was much clearer and better-founded than that adopted by Gorter. At the Third Congress of the Comintern Radek and Zinoviev accused him of 'supporting Kronstadt'.<sup>18</sup> While noting that the Russian proletariat had risen against the Communist Party and that he would much prefer to have 'a dictatorship of the class, instead of a dictatorship of the party', Gorter considered the measures taken by the Bolsheviks with regard to Kronstadt to be 'necessary'. They had crushed the 'counter-revolution', and Gorter implicitly envisaged that left-communists would be led to take such measures in the West if the counter-revolution were as strong among part of the proletariat: 'You can still repress the counter-revolution when part of the proletariat rises against you as at Kronstadt and Petrograd, because there it is weak enough. But here it would triumph, if part of the proletariat rose against us. For here, the counter-revolution is very powerful.'<sup>19</sup>

This conception, strange coming from a militant appealing for a 'dictatorship of the class' in the form of the councils (a demand which had been, in part, formulated at Kronstadt), is explained, above all, by the enactment of the NEP on 15 March, at the same time as the assault against Kronstadt. This constituted, as Riazanov rightly emphasised, a veritable 'peasant Brest-Litovsk'. The freedom for the peasants to dispose of their surplus and the freedom to trade were all retreats before the forces of the petty-bourgeoisie. If this concession was, for Lenin, a temporary retreat, it nevertheless heralded the famous 'enrich yourselves' addressed by Bukharin to the *kulaks*. It is symptomatic that these measures, more than the repression, disarmed all attempt at a soldiers' insurrection in support of the Kronstadt mutiny.

Gorter – unlike the KAPD, which had begun to build close relations with the Russian left-communists and was better informed – saw in Kronstadt and the

17 Intervention at the extraordinary congress of the KAPD in Berlin, 11–14 September 1921. Reproduced in the proceedings: Klockner (ed.) 1981, pp. 58–9.

18 Komintern 1921a, pp. 90, 342. Schwab (pseudonyms: Franz Sachs; Sigrist), KAPD delegate to the Third Congress, had the same point of view as Gorter, declaring that 'Gorter does not side with the Kronstadt insurgents and it is the same for the KAPD' (p. 621).

19 *Die Klassenkampf Organisation des Proletariats*, in Gorter and Pannekoek 1969.

NEP the triumph of a peasant counter-revolution.<sup>20</sup> According to him, 'a little action by a group of peasants – it is said that the crews of the warships were, for the most part, made up of the sons of peasants – would be sufficient' for 'communism to fall at the slightest blow'. The Bolshevik party thus appeared as the party of the peasantry and 'the proletariat made to serve the peasantry'.<sup>21</sup>

However, all the left-communists, Gorter, Pannekoek and the KAPD included, were agreed in denouncing the counter-revolutionary direction of the measures taken in the economic and political fields. From April 1921 the KAPD, via its delegates in Moscow, denounced 'the present forms which seem to come close to a sort of state-capitalism'. Moreover, after the Tenth Congress of the Russian party banned the Workers' Opposition as an organised fraction, and all fractions in general, workers' democracy in the Bolshevik party was dead: 'After the last congress of the Russian Soviet Republic, there can be no doubt that in Russia there is no dictatorship of the proletariat, but a dictatorship of the party'.<sup>22</sup> This position, which Gorter shared with the KAPD, was the harbinger of a break with the Comintern.

The Russian question, and so the fate of the Comintern, became major preoccupations within the Dutch and German communist left. From now on, the fate of the Russian Revolution and the Comintern was played out in Germany.

### 1.2 *The 1921 March Action*

Although limited to Central Germany, the March Action was a serious defeat for the revolution in that country. This action took place as repeated defeats reduced the German proletariat to complete passivity. The Social-Democratic Interior-Minister, Carl Severing (1875–1952), who had made a name for himself in the Ruhr in 1920 through his talents as a 'ruler' by calling on the *Reichswehr*, had decided to 'pacify' Central Germany, where the workers had kept their weapons. On 18 March, the same day as the fall of Kronstadt, the Social Democracy militarily occupied Central Germany. This region was one of the strongest

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20 The KAPD delegates in Moscow had more contact with the group of Efim Nikitich Ignatov (1890–1938?) in Moscow (see KAZ No. 204) than with Alexandra Kollontai. The Ignatov group demanded respect for workers' democracy and the struggle against the party-bureaucracy. It also demanded – and this did not displease the KAPD – that the leading organs of the Bolshevik party should be at least two-thirds composed of workers. It was based on the Workers' Opposition.

21 Gorter 1972.

22 Gorter, 'Partei, Klasse und Masse', in *Proletarier*, organ of the KAPD, No. 4, Berlin, March 1921.



bastions of the two rival parties, the VKPD and KAPD. The KAPD, in spite of the split by the 'Saxon' Rühle tendency, led a very strong union (AAU) in the Leuna factories, which had 2,000 members among 20,000 workers. Moreover, men like Max Hölz and Karl Plättner,<sup>23</sup> members of the KAPD (only very informally, it is true) were very popular in Central Germany for their 'expropriation-actions'.<sup>24</sup> They were the military organisers of the party in this region.

It was in this context, with the German proletariat on the defensive, that the Executive of the Comintern or part of it started to develop the theory of 'forcing the revolution'. Men like Bela Kun were sent to Germany to incite the VKPD to pass onto the offensive, including armed actions. The Executive of the Comintern abruptly swapped the opportunist tactic of the 'open letter' to the unions proposing a 'united front', for this adventurist, putschist one.

The call launched by the VKPD for the arming of workers and the general strike in the district of Halle, which included the Leuna factories, found little echo. Faced with this passivity, Eberlein, the former delegate of the KPD at the First Congress of the Comintern, even proposed to fake outrages against the VKPD to stir up the 'indignation of the masses'! Supported by the delegates of the Executive, he advocated armed insurrection in Central Germany at any price.<sup>25</sup>

The KAPD, for its part, also fell into adventurism. When the workers of Central Germany, and those of the Leuna chemical-factories, hesitated to engage in armed struggle against the Social-Democratic police, it pushed for insurrection. It addressed exalted proclamations to the German workers: 'With guns and knives, with fists and teeth, go to work. The die is cast!' Not seeing the putschist

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23 Pseudonyms: Braun, Schuster.

24 Since 1920 the KAPD had formed clandestine combat-organisations (*Kampforganisationen*), parallel to the party. Concealed behind the 'sporting-clubs' (*Kommunistische Arbeitersportvereinigung*), they were usually dismantled by the police, as in Berlin in autumn 1920. Those which survived in Saxony and in Vogtland were very active, but autonomous. In 1921, a veritable 'military centre' was created under Plättner's leadership. The *Oberste Aktionsrat* ('Supreme Council of Action') was detached from the KAPD, and particularly active in 'expropriations' and 'military' actions. The 'actions' of Plättner were parallel to those of Max Hölz. The latter, excluded from the KPD in autumn 1920, joined the KAPD at the beginning of 1921. Plättner was, in reality, a more important, more theoretical element who had led a sharp struggle against Rühle, in the form of pamphlets and writings. But, hostile to 'individual actions', the KAP in Leipzig had excluded him in March 1921: see KAZ (Berlin), No. 54, July 1923, 'K. Plättner and Genossen'. For the KAPD, Plättner was a 'Bakuninist' element: see KAZ (Berlin), No. 55, 1923. The KAPD was thus far from supporting the practice of 'individual actions'.

25 Broué 1971, pp. 474–85.

manoeuvre of the VKPD, the KAPD believed that 'the masses of the VKP are active and are following [their] slogans. They have compelled their leaders to do this'.<sup>26</sup> The KAPD also formed a struggle-committee with the VKPD to co-ordinate the action, as much on the level of strikes as on the 'military' level.

However, faced with the government's offensive, the strike-call launched by the KAPD and the VKPD in the whole of Germany got little response. Across the whole country, about 300,000 workers followed the call. The strike met with very little response in Berlin, despite the attempt to occupy the factories by surprise and prevent the workers from going to work. The joint demonstration of the two parties, the KAPD and the VKPD, attracted 400,000 people, and that only with great difficulty. In the majority of cases, the workers remained very suspicious, if not hostile, towards this type of action.

The KAPD, in spite of its great militancy in the March Action, was divided, particularly in Central Germany. On the one hand, two leaders of the KAPD, Franz Jung and Fritz Rasch, were sent by the party-centre to co-ordinate strikes and actions with the VKPD. On the other hand, Max Hölz, arriving in Berlin, organised his own action-commandos in Central Germany, but without any link to the KAPD: these units conducted a guerrilla-struggle against the police in the mining-district of Eisleben. It was the same for Karl Plättner and a throng of other anonymous leaders of the KAPD, who set up their own militia, but in a less publicised way than Hölz. Such actions were, besides, disowned by the workers of the gigantic Leuna factory, of whom at least half were sympathetic to the AAU and the KAPD. The leaders of the AAU and the KAPD at Leuna, Peter Utzelmann<sup>27</sup> and Max Pretzlow, who had called the strike and formed an action-committee with the VKPD, which was concretised in the formation of 17 armed proletarian squads, rejected all armed struggle with the police. Given the unfavourable balance of forces, a confrontation would be 'an insane and criminal holocaust'.<sup>28</sup> They were unaware that Max Hölz was several kilo-

26 KAZ (Berlin), Nos. 181 and 182. The KAPD incontestably gave in to putschism. This had been particularly strong in August 1920: for example on 21 August 1920, in Velbert in the Ruhr the KAPD set up a 'council-republic' that lasted seventeen hours! See Ihlau 1971, p. 19.

27 Ihlau 1971, pp. 19–21.

28 Franz Peter Utzelmann interview, February 1966, by Olaf Ihlau 1971. Peter Utzelmann (1895–1972) (pseudonym: Kempin), born in Berlin, furniture-maker, sailor, later operator; took part in the sailors' revolt of Kiel in 1918, the Spartakist insurrection of January 1919, and the general strike against the Kapp Putsch. Sent to prison for life after the March Action, he was released thanks to an amnesty in 1923. He then left the KAPD and after 1928 was a member of the SPD, then from 1930 a member of the *Rote Kämpfer* group set up by Schröder and Schwab, until his arrest by the Gestapo in 1937. He was condemned to

metres away and that Jung and Rasch were on the spot. In consequence, they evacuated a large part of the insurgents on the night of 28 March in order to prevent a massacre. The next day the factory was bombarded by the police, who killed 34 workers and took 1,500 prisoners. There was great bitterness among the militants of the KAPD at Leuna who disagreed with their party and with Max Hölz's tactics.<sup>29</sup> Hölz, with his 2,000 partisans, was surrounded, and after a battle lasting ten days, had to abandon the fight on 15 April. On 31 March, the VKPD withdrew from the armed struggle. That was the end of the March Action, the result a defeat.

A heavy price was paid for the March Action: a hundred dead amongst the workers' ranks, thousands arrested, thousands condemned to the fortress. Hölz, Plättner, and Utzelmann were sentenced to hard labour. The result was more disastrous for the VKPD than for the KAPD: the former saw its numbers fall from 350,000 members to 150,000 in a matter of weeks. The KAPD, by contrast, remained stable: from 38,000 militants in April 1920, at the time of its formation, it even grew to 41,000 militants in September 1921, according to the figures given at its extraordinary congress (see below). It is certain that the KAPD remained, for many workers, the party of Max Hölz, who was to enjoy an immense popularity in prison, directly proportional to the demoralisation among the workers. Hölz's individualist activism was itself the other side of the coin of the collective passivity of the mass of workers. The publicity that the KAPD gave to the person of Hölz, and that it received in return, could only be of short duration: Hölz left the KAPD in November 1921 and immediately rejoined the VKPD.<sup>30</sup>

More than the Kronstadt events, the March Action was to accelerate the split between the KAPD, and the whole communist left in the Netherlands, on one side, and the VKPD and the Comintern on the other. The KAPD opened up a

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four and a half years of hard labour. During the war, he was in a disciplinary battalion. He became a member of the SED in 1946, taking part in the activities of the Weiland group, and in 1949 he was in charge of wood-industries in the Soviet zone (SBZ). Jailed in 1949, he was able to flee to Western Berlin in 1950, where he had some difficulty in being recognised as a political refugee.

29 Utzelmann and other members of the KAP in Leuna would have 'shot Hölz down', if they had had the opportunity (interview mentioned above). The Mexican writer Paco Ignacio Taibo II has given a romantic evocation of Max Hölz, as a 'political heretic', in his book *Arcángeles* (Taibo 1998).

30 Letter of 24 November 1921 from Max Hölz to Emil Schubert, 'President of the KAPD' (sic), mentioned in Hölz, 1927, p. 422. Hölz pretended that the KAPD 'made publicity with his corpse'. He found much better 'publicity' in the VKPD.

lively polemic, aided by Gorter, against the VKPD and the Comintern's attitude towards the March Action. A pamphlet, whose later sections may have been written by Gorter, was specially published: *The way of Doctor Levi, the way of the VKPD*.<sup>31</sup> Levi had criticised the attitude of the Executive of the Comintern and the VKPD leadership during the March Action in a pamphlet: *Wider Putschismus* ('Against putschism'). For Paul Levi, the March Action was 'The greatest Bakuninist putsch in history'. The fact of having criticised his party and the Comintern and then of bringing out a pamphlet without referring the matter to them, led to his exclusion. His criticisms were, nevertheless, widely shared within the VKPD, by the right around Clara Zetkin, and by Lenin in the Comintern. For Gorter, as for the KAPD, Levi's pamphlet was all the more dangerous because its basis, the criticism of putschism, was correct. This criticism could only advance the old Social-Democratic pacifist and parliamentary tactics, in that it inculcated not only the leadership of the VKPD and the Comintern, but also – at the very heart of the problem – all minority- and defensive insurrectionary class-movements. Levi, according to Gorter, abandoned all elementary solidarity with revolutionary minorities of the proletariat who were prey to the capitalist offensive.<sup>32</sup>

The pamphlet by the KAPD and Gorter was not a self-criticism of the party's activity in the March Action. That was never really made.<sup>33</sup> It was a defence of the minority-movement of workers in Central Germany, forced onto the

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31 KAPD 1921. Chapter Three is perhaps Gorter's.

32 Paul Levi ended up rejoining the Social Democracy: after forming the KAG (*Kommunistische Arbeitsgemeinschaft*) in July 1921 – which published the periodical *Sowjet*, then *Unser Weg* – in February 1922, he passed to the USPD, then to the SPD, and committed suicide in 1930. See Abendroth, Flechtheim and Fetscher (eds.) 1969.

33 A real critique was made, above all, by Otto Rühle. The latter, although in disagreement with the March Action, had yielded to the 'revolutionary discipline' of the AAU in Dresden, and had awaited the end of the fighting to voice his criticisms. He considered – which is far from certain – that the events of Kronstadt had pushed the Comintern into putschist tactics in Germany. The March Action had overturned the course of the revolution in Germany:

'A new defeat! A new tragedy! Hundreds of the most noble combatants fallen, thousands thrown into penitentiary or prison for thousands of years: the German bourgeoisie could not have wished for better ... The vanguard of the proletariat has been annihilated, with the aid of the VKPD! ... The revolution in Germany is lost for a long time' ('Das Ende der mitteldeutschen Kämpfe', *Die Aktion*, No. 15–16, April 1921).

Otto Rühle, like Pfemfert, was shamefully slandered by the VKPD: they were accused of having handed Hölz over to the police, a lie against which Hölz protested energetically from his prison-cell (*Die Aktion*, No. 17–18, 30 April 1921).

defensive. The KAPD showed that this movement was defensive, over and above any offensive tactic pronounced by the Comintern and the leadership of the VKPD. The joint strike-call by the two parties was 'exclusively an act of defence and solidarity faced with a counter-revolutionary attack'.<sup>34</sup>

Gorter and the KAPD tarred Levi and the VKPD leadership with the same brush. The latter was the incarnation of the 'stupidity of the VKPD, the stupidity of the Executive Committee in Moscow, the stupidity of the Third International in the clearest way'.<sup>35</sup> The putschism of the VKPD, correctly emphasised by Gorter, could only be the other side of the coin of the parliamentary politics of Levi and the Comintern: 'The two methods do not contradict each other; they grow inevitably on the soil of opportunism'.<sup>36</sup>

The pamphlet by Gorter and the KAPD suffered from a certain number of weaknesses. It greatly overestimated the significance of the March Action and the march of events. In a contradictory way, it proclaimed, on the one hand, that the March Action was defensive; on the other, that it was the 'first attack by conscious revolutionary proletarians of Germany against the bourgeois state'.<sup>37</sup> While Rühle lucidly emphasised that 'the revolution in Germany has been lost for a long time',<sup>38</sup> Gorter and the KAPD saw the workers on a revolutionary course: 'For the German workers, the spell of passivity that for so long

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34 KAPD 1921, p. 5.

35 KAPD 1921, p. 13.

36 KAPD 1921, p. 11.

The putschism urged by the Comintern was directly in line with its degeneration: the Bulgarian Communist Party launched itself into an insurrection, without preparation, in September 1923; on 1 December 1924, the little Estonian Communist Party attempted to take power in Reval, without any support from the workers; lastly, in November 1927 the Chinese CP, at the instigation of the Comintern, attempted to take power in Canton.

37 KAPD 1921, p. 21.

38 'Das Ende der mitteldeutschen Kämpfe', *Die Aktion*, No. 15–16, April 1921. But Rühle was an individualist; instead of pursuing militant-activity he devoted himself more and more to pedagogic projects. After 1924, he broke with the Unionist movement (AAU-E) and published together with his wife Alice Rühle-Gerstel (1894–1943) – both of them influenced by the thought of the psycho-analyst Alfred Adler – the Marxist-Adlerian periodical: *Am anderen Ufer. Blätter für sozialistische Erziehung* (January 1924–February 1925, Nos. 1–5). In 1925 he formed (in Dresden) the *Marxistisch individual-psychologischen Arbeitsgemeinschaft* ('Work-group of Marxist individualist psychology'), together with his wife, a psycho-analyst. The couple edited the periodical *Das proletarische Kind. Monatsblätter für proletarische Erziehung*. (January 1925–12 February 1926, Nos. 1–6.) After a biographical book on Marx and three books on the 1848 revolutions in Europe, published in 1927, Rühle wrote an impressive cultural history of the German proletariat (1930), *Illustrierte Kultur-und Sittengeschichte des Proletariats*, amazingly published by Willy Münzen-

bewitched the German revolution is at last broken'.<sup>39</sup> A naive incantation, when in the same pamphlet it is stated bitterly that 'even the great masses of Central Germany remained neutral, if not hostile, towards the vanguard's struggle'.<sup>40</sup> Finally the March Action could only have an 'educational' effect on the workers' consciousness: 'The open struggle against the bourgeois capitalist state unmasked for all the true face of democracy'.<sup>41</sup> But after January 1919, had the German proletariat really been waiting until March 1921 to discover the 'true face of democracy'? No answer was given to this question.

Gorter and the KAPD did not see that the revolutionary advance in Germany and the world was in the process of being reversed. They realised it too late in 1923.<sup>42</sup> In 1921 they counted on the worldwide economic crisis: in fact, until 1928 capitalism stabilised under the effects of reconstruction, though it is also true that Germany only felt this from 1924 to 1928. The world-crisis would almost automatically be transformed into revolutionary victory: 'The *world-crisis* [Gorter's emphasis] contained for two years after the conclusion of the war must now begin: it will be terrible, and can and will give us our victory'.<sup>43</sup> This confusion between the 'historic crisis of capitalism (decadence)' unfolding over a whole period and the 'open crisis' explains the adventurism that ultimately led to the establishment of the KAI, as a means to force the real historic course.

At its Third Congress, the Comintern, via Trotsky,<sup>44</sup> was much more lucid than Gorter, but with the idea of pursuing the tactic of 'united fronts' and parliamentarism:

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berg (1887–1940) – a leader of the KPD – in his own publishing-house, Neuer Deutscher Verlag. After 1931, Rühle was involved more and more in political and theoretical activity, under the pseudonyms of Carl Steuermann in Germany, and Carlos Timoneros in Mexico. He took part in the Dewey Commission, which was an 'impartial body' initiated in March 1937 by the American Committee for the Defense of Leon Trotsky, after the Moscow Trials.

39 KAPD 1921, p. 22.

40 KAPD 1921, p. 24.

41 KAPD 1921, p. 25.

42 The press and leaflets of the KAPD, in 1923, constantly pointed to the passivity of the German proletariat and insisted on the fact that it was only 'five minutes' from defeat.

43 KAPD 1921, p. 19.

44 Speech by Trotsky, published in the form of a pamphlet, *The New Course*. Writing in a penetrating manner, Trotsky emphasised that: 'Humanity does not stay still. Its equilibrium, following the struggles between classes and nations, is unstable. If a society cannot rise, it falls; and if no class exists which can raise itself, it decomposes and opens the way to barbarism' (Trotsky 1922, p. 76). Less 'clever' was the forecast of a war between the USA and Great Britain before 1924.

The situation must become more and more favourable to us, but also more and more complex. We will not win victory automatically. The ground beneath our enemy's feet is undermined, but our enemy is strong, it knows how to manoeuvre and is guided by cool calculation ... The greater the peril, the more a class, as much as an individual, stretches all its living force in the struggle for its survival

And Trotsky concluded: 'In 1919 we said it was a question of months. Today we say: it is, perhaps, a question of years'.<sup>45</sup>

In fact, the German and Dutch left-communist current found itself completely isolated in the Comintern, even before making its voice heard for the last time at a congress of the International. There were few reactions within the International against the politics of the Russian state, and the Comintern tactic of Clara Zetkin, who defended Levi's point of view, was supported at the congress by Lenin. But for the Dutch, as for the Germans, it was a question of battling to the end to save the Russian Revolution and the world-revolution by detaching the Third International from the hold of the Russian state:

We must act by every means so that Russia remains a proletarian power. But if we are to take account of the conditions of the Western-European revolution, then our goal must be to detach the Third International politically and organisationally from the policy of the Russian state. The next step on the way to this goal seems to us to be the building of a political organ in Western Europe, which in the closest contact with Moscow allows us to obtain a continual independence in all political and tactical questions as they affect Western Europe.<sup>46</sup>

This proposal, taken up again in 1926 by Bordiga, nonetheless left to one side the question of the political control of the Russian state and of the Bolshevik party by the Third International. It looked like wishful thinking, which Pannekoek also shared. According to him, with the March Action 'the spiritual leadership of the Western-European revolution passed from Russia to Western Europe itself'. For the workers of Europe, the Russian proletariat and its leaders had become above all 'simply a companion in struggle and an ally'.<sup>47</sup>

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45 Quoted by Broué 1971, p. 516.

46 KAZ (Berlin), 1 May 1921.

47 Pannekoek, 'Sowjet Russland und der west-europäische Kommunismus', in *Proletarier*, No. 6, June 1921.

## 2 The Exclusion of the Communist Left From the Comintern

Although condemned to isolation, and treated as anarchists or Left-Social Revolutionaries by the Russian leaders of the Comintern, there was not yet any question of the communist left forming an International, and still less a league of discontents.<sup>48</sup> The German-Dutch left rejected all alliances or fronts with anarchists, even when it had been excluded from the Comintern. In a reply to the anarchist Erich Mühsam, who had once been a member of the VKPD (for just fifteen days in September 1919) but was eventually excluded from it, and proposed a front of all those excluded, Pannekoek gave a negative response in the name of the left, categorically and without allowing for an appeal. Even once excluded from the Third Congress, the Dutch and German lefts would maintain solidarity with the Bolsheviks:

You want to form a league of all the revolutionary groups excluded by Moscow. We do not want to, because such a league must itself become the declared enemy of Moscow. We feel, despite the exclusion of our tendency by the Moscow congress, complete solidarity with the Russian Bolsheviks ... We stand firm, not only with the Russian proletariat, but also with the Bolshevik leaders, although we must criticise in the firmest way their conduct within international communism.<sup>49</sup>

Pannekoek's response was far-sighted: after Kronstadt and the March Action, the definitive exclusion of the communist left from the Comintern was on the agenda. The first to suffer it was the Dutch left itself.

### 2.1 *The Left of the Dutch Communist Party*

The attacks on the CPH opposition, after Wijnkoop gave his support to the theses of the Second Congress of the Comintern, were made more violent by the 'Wijnkoopist' leadership. The opposition, though solidly organised around its organ *De Roode Vaan*, remained isolated; its supporters were little more than a third of the party, but it enjoyed a large echo among the workers of the CPH. The sections in the industrial towns of Enschede and Zwolle were in its hands. The 'intellectuals' like Pannekoek himself, and above all Roland Holst, a 'centrist' by vocation, were very hesitant about conducting a struggle on

48 Trotsky 1922, pp. 111–14. Trotsky's assimilation of the KAPD to a group of 'adventurers', 'anarchists' and 'Left-Social Revolutionaries' heralded their exclusion.

49 *Die Aktion*, No. 11–12, 19 March 1921.



the side of Luteraan and the Korpers. Pannekoek was much more comfortable committing himself from afar with the KAPD against the opportunism of the Comintern, than he was fighting practically the same opportunism in his own party.<sup>50</sup>

For the opposition, after the Second Congress of the Comintern, there was no doubt that Wijnkoop, who was called the Dutch Levi due to his 'totally personal and despotic' methods, was preparing for 'the exclusion of all opposition-currents'.<sup>51</sup> They could count on no support from the syndicalist, anarchist NAS, which walked hand-in-hand with the CPH. As for the KAPD and Pannekoek, it was out of the question to form an opposition-front with syndicalist revolutionaries, who criticised the politics of Moscow. *De Roode Vaan* clearly put the NAS and Wijnkoop on the same level: 'With a few exceptions, the trade-unionists of all countries adopt the viewpoint of treason as a principle. They are the adversaries ... of the council-system, of the dictatorship; they preach an impotent pacifism in the domain of both internal and external politics.'<sup>52</sup> The joint work the union carried out with Troelstra's Social Democrats' NVV union heralded a merger with it: this also encouraged the opposition to combat the NAS.

Nevertheless it was the announcement of a merger between the NAS and the NVV, which saved the opposition, for a while. At the CPH congress held in October 1920, the party-leadership presented a resolution, following the line taken by the Second Congress of the Comintern, recommending the dissolution of the NAS into the NVV. A general hue and cry was raised, not only in the NAS, but also in the CPH. The great majority rose up against Moscow's union-policy and against Van Ravesteyn, who was its keenest partisan. Wijnkoop gave the impression that he wanted to apply the decisions of the Second Congress, but in reality supported all those who, for various reasons, criticised Russian policy. This is why he allowed the publication – unusually, given the absolute and despotic control which he exercised over *De Tribune* – of an article by Luteraan against the policy of the Comintern. Luteraan emphasised 'the main error of the Third International which consisted of seeking to reduce all countries to the Russian denominator'.<sup>53</sup> Attacked by the majority as well as by

50 *De Roode Vaan*, No. 6, January 1920, had already accused Henriëtte Roland Holst, not without reason, of serving to 'put the brake on the opposition'. For professional reasons, Pannekoek contented himself with writing in the theoretical journal *De Nieuwe Tijd*, hiding behind pseudonyms such as J. Braak, K. Horner, L.V. and Van Loo.

51 *De Roode Vaan*, No. 1, September 1920, 'Het congres der CP'.

52 *De Roode Vaan*, No. 2, October 1920.

53 *De Tribune*, 22 October 1920, cited in Wiessing 1980.

the opposition, the resolution was declared 'premature' by the congress and remitted 'to the next congress'.

Wijnkoop's tactic of using the opposition was short-lived. Several months later, in April 1921, he was to dissolve the Enschede section. The latter had written a motion demanding that the two currents in the party should be represented at the Third Congress of the Comintern, which was to be held in June. The opposition was only demanding the application of the most elementary rules of workers' democracy. In dissolving the Enschede section, to replace it with another, the Wijnkoop leadership 'resolved' the section's demand in its own way. This affair was the beginning of a veritable witch-hunt against the dissolved Enschede section. Luteraan was excluded from the CPH in May 1921. Wijnkoop did not stop there. He did not hesitate to heap slanders on the Enschede militant G.J. Geers, excluded together with the forty members of the section.<sup>54</sup> He was accused of being a German spy, when he was in fact in Spain at the time. His main crime was to have been one of the main writers for *De Roode Vaan*. All those who expressed their solidarity with Luteraan and Geers were excluded: in June, it was the turn of the Zwolle militants (and also Gerrit Jordens). It should be noted that all these exclusions were statutorily irregular, since they emanated not from a congress of the party, but from the leading bodies of the CPH. All the demands by those excluded to lift the ban at least until the CPH congress, to be held in November, were rejected. Wijnkoop's last act against the opposition was an attempt to take over *De Nieuwe Tijd*, established in 1896. He failed, as the majority of the editors of the old Marxist periodical opposed the move, and refused to turn it over to Roland Holst, who was in the habit of sentimentally supporting the opposition but following the rule of the majority out of weakness.<sup>55</sup> The last issue appeared in December 1921. Pannekoek had, in the meantime, left the CPH, formally remaining on the editorial board of *De Nieuwe Tijd*, but without joining the newly-formed KAPN.

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54 *De Roode Vaan*, No. 6, June 1921, 'Van Deventer tot Enschede'. G.J. Geers (1893–1965), a Spanish teacher, living in Enschede, enjoying the total confidence of his comrades, was part of the central committee of the KAPN in the early 1920s. After leaving the KAPN, he became a Hispanologist, professor at Groningen University. He is known for his 1932 book on the Spanish Renaissance: *De Renaissance in Spanje: kultuur, literatuur* (Zutphen: Thieme). After the Second World-War, he became the president of the pacifist *De Derde Weg* (1952–6), the 'neither East nor West' movement. After 1956, he was member of the PSP (Pacifist Socialist Party).

55 At the Third Congress of the Comintern, Henriëtte Roland Holst had the merit of defending Gorter and those who were called the 'KAPists'.

The opposition energetically re-organised after this wave of exclusions (of which the last, by an irony of history, was the Deventer section: Deventer, the glorious symbol of the Tribunist current, was also its death-certificate). About 200 of the CPH's 2,000 members had been excluded. On 4 September 1921 they formed the Communist Workers' Party of Holland (KAPN) at Amersfoort. It existed in ten districts, including Amsterdam and Rotterdam. As for the CPH, which Roland Holst stuck with during the split, it was not long before it suffered fresh splits.<sup>56</sup>

## 2.2 *The Exclusion of the Bulgarian Left-Communists from the Comintern*

The opposition within the Bulgarian Communist Party was constituted between February and May 1919. At its founding congress the party had 25,000 members, of whom barely 2,200 were industrial workers. At this congress the opposition had defended a left-communist line: rejection of parliamentarism and rejection of all alliances with the peasantry, of which the political representative was the peasant-party of Stambulisky, who was the head of the government.<sup>57</sup> This was enough for part of the opposition to be excluded in April 1920 in Sofia – Ivan Ganchev, Stefan Ivanov, and Georgi Petrov<sup>58</sup> as 'lead-

56 From 1923, a strong opposition, more directed against the despotic leadership of Wijnkoop than determined by questions of principle, developed within the CPH. The minority, organised in a Committee for the Third International, and led by Jacques de Kadt, wanted respect for party 'democracy'. Wijnkoop's response was the exclusion of De Kadt. While Sneevliet took over the leadership of the Opposition in the CPH, De Kadt formed the 'Federation of clubs for communist propaganda and struggle' (BKSP), outside the party, together with Roland Holst, though she left in 1925 to form an ephemeral *Revolutionair Arbeiders Comité* (RAC). In July 1924 it was to publish a weekly, *De Kommunist*. To prevent the disintegration of the party the Comintern, through Zinoviev, imposed the dismissal of Wijnkoop, Ceton, and Van Ravesteyn from the leadership, and the election of a new leadership in May 1925. Part of the BKSP, including Roland Holst, returned to the CPH. However, in 1927, Roland Holst, together with Sneevliet, left the CPH, after Stalin's victory over Trotsky ('Henriëtte Roland Holst verlaat de Partij', *De Tribune*, 22 November 1927). In 1928 De Kadt and other members of the BKSP passed to the SDAP. Excluded in 1926, Wijnkoop then formed his own party, the CPH (Central Committee); in 1930 he returned to the CPH, with his supporters – except Van Ravesteyn, who abandoned political activity completely in 1926 – to follow all the twists and turns of Stalinism, but without 're-conquering' the CPH leadership. As for Sneevliet (who sympathised with Trotsky), his opposition was made up of syndicalists from the NAS, and he left the CPH for good in 1927. That was the last left-opposition within the party, which then definitively turned to Stalinism.

57 See Dujcev, Velikov, Mitev and Panaytov 1977, and above all, Schärf 1967, pp. 199–206.

58 Pseudonym: Georgi Barzev.

ers' – such that it now existed both inside and outside the party. The Bulgarian left, despite the presence of Slavi Zidarov in Moscow, was not given a consultative voice as to express its anti-parliamentarian positions during the sessions of the Second Congress of the Comintern. Only the official delegates – Khristo Kabaktchiev (1878–1940), Nikola Shablin (1881–1925) and Dr. Nikola Maximov – had the right to intervene, defending the utility of parliamentarism.

In September 1920, left-communist groups were founded 'in nearly all the industrial centres'. On 4 September 1920, under the leadership of the journalist and translator Ivan Ganchev (1877–1925) they began publishing a paper: *Iskra* ('The Spark'). These groups then elected a provisional Central Executive Committee.<sup>59</sup> Their struggle against the politics of the Bulgarian CP centre became sharper when in November 1920 the latter, applying the Comintern policy of fusion with left-social democracy, merged with the majority of the Social Democrats. This merger produced an enormous mass-party of 40,000 members, a considerable number amongst a working class of only 150,000. Opposing both this merger-policy and the leadership of the party, a mass of workers in the industrial towns were excluded.<sup>60</sup> By spring 1921, the opposition had grown from 1,000 to 2,000 members, both within and outside the party.

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59 Left-communist groups were formed in most industrial centres, and in September 1920 they elected a provisional executive, including Prodanov (pseudonym of Ivan Popov), Christo Fashchiev, Ziporarov and Gurinov. See letter in French from the Bulgarian KAP (BKP) to Emil Sach, member of the Bureau of Organisation of the KAI, March 1922, in the Canne Meijer Archives, map 240/5, IISG, Amsterdam.

60 Letter of greetings to the September 1921 Congress of the KAPD, from Ivan Ganchev, in the name of the executive of the 'Bulgarian Left-Communist Groups', in Klockner (ed.) 1981, pp. 18–20. Ivan Ganchev – born in Vidin in October 1877 – had been a member of the Bulgarian Social Democracy since 1898. He had studied Chemistry in Germany. From 1907, he was a socialist journalist in Sofia for the *Rabotnitcheski Vestnik*. He had been an important leader of the trade-union movement in Bulgaria: in 1911, together with Kolarov (1877–1950) and Dimitrov (1882–1949), he was a delegate to the Seventh International Conference of Social-Democratic trades-unions in Budapest; in 1913 he was a delegate to the Balkan trade-union conference in Vienna. He had to participate in the Balkan War of 1912–13 as officer. In 1919, he led the left-tendency of the BKP, the newly-formed Communist Party. In Sofia – together with Georgi Petrov (Barzev) – he founded the paper *Iskra* (1920–21), organ of the Left-Communists (*Levite Komunisti*). From mid-1922, he published the 'leftist' periodical *Revoliutsionnata Istina* ('Revolutionary Truth'). Nevertheless, he was reintegrated into the BKP after June 1923, following the putsch against Stambolijski, and became the editor of the legal journal of the party, *Lach* ('Rays') (1923–5). His periodical rapidly gravitated towards the opposition and he was expelled. By 1924, he had probably also joined the independent cultural 'leftist' group which published *Nashi*

Their basic positions were anti-parliamentarism and propaganda for a general workers' union (*obshchiya rabotnitcheski yunion*), in this sense following the model of the German communist left.

The opposition did not at all want to leave the party or the Comintern. It wanted to obtain the reintegration of those excluded. Consequently, the left-communist groups of the Bulgarian CP sent delegates to Moscow to get a mandate to allow them to participate, at least with a consultative voice, in the Third Congress of the Comintern.

By March 1921, the Bulgarian delegates were in Moscow, where they tried repeatedly to obtain a mandate like that accorded to the VKPD opposition, so as to participate fully in the congress of the International to which they belonged.<sup>61</sup> This was refused by Radek, for whom there was no 'Bulgarian question'. Following this refusal, the left-communists made contact with the KAPD delegates in Moscow in June and July, and even sent delegates to Berlin to make contact with the leadership of the KAPD and participate in its next congress.

Excluded from the Comintern, the Bulgarians found themselves forced to form a new party. This took place soon after the KAPD congress. A founding conference from 7–10 January 1922 – held in the industrial town of Sliven, an important textile-centre – formed the Bulgarian Communist Workers' Party (BRKP), whose executive committee was based in Varna.<sup>62</sup> The statutes of the party insisted that two-thirds of the Central Executive Committee should be workers, and that every three months it should be renewed, for fear of 'bureaucratisation' and 'intellectuals'! Its organ was the *Rabotnitcheska Iskra*, ('Workers' Spark'), 'edited by proletarians'. Very workerist, the party was made up of more than a thousand militants and was essentially composed of workers, who had a solid, and justified distrust for the party's intellectuals.

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*Dni* ('Our days'). In April 1925, he was killed in a Sofia police-station. See Arabadzhiev 1964, Blagoev 1963 and his entry in *Entsiklopediya Balgariya* 1978–88.

61 KAZ (Berlin), No. 219, August 1921, 'Die Linken Kommunisten Bulgariens'.

62 See Emil Sach's letter, already cited. Out of distrust for the 'intellectuals' in Sofia, like Ganchev and Prodanov, the Central Executive Committee was moved to Varna, on the Black Sea: 'a provisional measure as long as Sofia could not form an organisation with working-class education, spirit and discipline'. Ganchev was opposed to the move. In 1922 Zhetcho Dikidzhiev was the secretary of the Central Executive Committee of the Varna tendency, and the student Krum Zhekov represented Varna at the official KAPD HQ in Berlin.

### 2.3 *The Exclusion of the German Communist Left*

All these exclusions took place with the endorsement of the Executive Committee, including those in the Netherlands, where Wijnkoop relied on the support of German delegates of the VKPD on the Executive to justify the expulsion of the opposition.<sup>63</sup>

The KAPD, which had come to Moscow with the hope of modifying the Comintern's policies and of becoming a full member-organisation through the lifting of the 21 Conditions, was quickly disappointed. The contacts that they had with different delegations proved that there was no possibility of creating an international opposition in the Comintern. The most fruitful contacts were those with the Bulgarians, the Workers' Opposition<sup>64</sup> the delegates from Mexico, Luxembourg, Belgium (War van Overstraeten), from England and Scotland (Glasgow)<sup>65</sup> or again with the syndicalists of the Spanish CNT and the American IWW. But apart from the Bulgarians, for fear of exclusion from the International, these groups all refused to form an organised opposition. The five delegates of the KAPD<sup>66</sup> had to bow to the facts: they were tragically isolated, but stayed at

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63 This is shown by a letter from Wijnkoop to *Die Rote Fahne*, of 15 June 1921. The *KAZ* (Berlin), No. 190, put forwards the hypothesis that Wijnkoop was acting on instructions from Moscow.

64 Alexandra Kollontai's pamphlet *The Workers' Opposition* was delivered to Reichenbach, the KAPD delegate, to take out of Russia and was soon to be translated into German, Dutch and English in the left-communist press. The relations between the KAPD and the Workers' Opposition were rapidly broken off.

65 This was Guy Aldred's Scottish group, strongly coloured with anarchism, which established international contacts with council-communism in the 1930s. Guy Aldred (1886–1963) presented himself as a candidate in the general elections many times. His group, with its periodical *Solidarity*, defended internationalist positions during the Second World-War. For the communist left in Great Britain, read the essential Shipway 1988.

66 As the list of delegations attests, there were *five* KAPD representatives: Jan Appel (pseudonym Hempel); Alexander Schwab ('Sachs'); Bernhard Reichenbach ('Seemann'); the engineering-worker Ludwig Meyer ('Bergmann'). The fifth was probably Käthe Friedländer, married to a Russian (Vassili I. Ruminov), who did not intervene. She remained after the congress to follow up contacts with the Russian Opposition (see Canne Meijer archives, map 49/3). At the time of a second, illegal trip to Russia, she was arrested by the *Cheka*. Another representative of the KAPD, the Romanian Heinz Kagan, was arrested by the *Cheka* in Moscow straight after the congress, and came within an inch of being shot as a 'Polish-Romanian spy' after making propaganda for the KAP. Freed and having returned to Romania, he was assassinated by the police (see KAPD 1922, p. 21).

Another leading member of the KAPD was present at the 1921 Comintern's Congress, as observer: John Graudenz (alias Thyssen or Thiessen); United Press journalist, he soon left the KAPD and lived in Moscow until 1924. He was the first journalist to give a com-

the congress until the end. This was markedly different from the irresponsibility of Rühle at the Second Congress:

... We were alone. We had to abandon our task of founding an opposition. But we cannot conclude that the representation of the KAPD at the congress was not justified and that we should have behaved a little like Rühle did at the Second Congress.<sup>67</sup>

At the congress, the KAPD strove with great courage to defend its positions on each of the agenda-items (economic crisis and the historic course; unions; the Russian question; the March Action). The interventions of its delegates, limited to only ten minutes, were greeted with laughter, interruptions or else indifference. The agenda was manipulated against them: their theses could not be discussed at the congress. Contrary to a tradition of the workers' movement, they were refused any time to present alternative reports from the opposition. Lastly, they were given an ultimatum to merge with the VKPD in three months, on pain of exclusion from the Comintern. The KAPD delegates rejected the ultimatum. Although the central committee of their party had accorded them 'full authority' to proclaim its 'immediate exit from the Third International', the delegates behaved in a responsible way: they did not proclaim they were leaving the International, since they wanted the whole party to pronounce on the question, in full awareness of the facts, without prejudicing its decisions:

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muniqué to American agencies on Lenin's death. After coming back to Berlin, he opened a photography agency; from 1936–42 a member of the conspiratorial group '*Rote Kapelle*', around Harro Schulze-Boysen and Dr. Arvid Harnack. Discovered, he was executed with other members of the network on 22 December 1942 in the Berlin Plötzensee prison.

67 KAZ (Berlin), No. 219, 'Die KAPD auf dem 3. Kongress'. It must be noted that the Executive of the Comintern had decided to send a delegation to an eventual KAPD congress and to reserve a place for its delegate in the Executive Committee in Moscow. But in August, Lenin expressed a clear determination to split:

'It goes without saying, however, that the semi-anarchist elements can and should be tolerated only within certain limits ... The Third Congress of the Communist International faced them with an ultimatum and fixed a definite time limit. If they have now voluntarily resigned from the Communist International, all the better. Firstly, they have saved us the trouble of expelling them ... We must now pay less attention to the KAPists. By polemicising with them we merely give them publicity. They are too unintelligent; it is wrong to take them seriously; and it is not worth being angry with them. They have no influence among the masses, and will acquire none, unless we make mistakes. Let us leave this tiny trend to die a natural death ...' (Lenin 1975, pp. 514–5).

The delegation unanimously rejects the ultimatum to merge with the VKPD. We are not proclaiming the exit of the KAPD from the Third International, despite our full authority to do so. Our comrades will pronounce themselves. They will give their response to this impudent demand to take the path of reformism, of opportunism. The international proletariat will hear this reply. We have taken our decision, fully aware of its seriousness. We have clear consciousness of our responsibility to the revolutionary German workers, to Soviet Russia, to the world-revolution. The revolution will not allow itself to be bound by a congress-resolution. We march with it. We follow our path in its service.<sup>68</sup>

As a revolutionary current, the KAPD found itself with a sad and difficult choice, all the more so given its influence on the whole of the international left-communist current:

- It could merge with the VKPD, and be rapidly reduced to nothing as an independent revolutionary current, under the effects of the manoeuvres of the party-leadership. The prospects of forming a fraction were shown to be practically impossible, as shown by the example of the CP in the Netherlands.
- It could form, as the Bordiga's followers did much later, an 'external fraction' of the International, with the aim of re-conquering the International and even the German party, the VKPD, expecting other significant fractions to be formed simultaneously.
- It could declare itself the founding part of an internationally organised and centralised left-communist current, while waiting for the conditions to arise for a 'new International'.
- It could proclaim the birth of a 'Fourth International', in a totally artificial way, and without taking account of the subjective factors of its formation.

The decision to be taken demanded a clear analysis of the international situation and of the historic course, and a theoretically solid evaluation of the nature of the Russian Revolution and the Comintern. It was vital that the German-Dutch current should achieve clarity, without undue haste, in view of the KAPD's extraordinary congress, which was to be held within two months of the Third Congress of the Comintern.

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68 Report made to the central committee of the KAPD, 31 July 1921, *Proletarier*, No. 7.



However, the leadership of the KAPD, clearly influenced by Gorter, was, indeed, to proceed with undue haste at the end of July 1921. In fact, on 31 July,<sup>69</sup> despite the opposition of the representatives from Hanover and eastern Saxony and despite the abstention of the party's largest district – 'Greater Berlin' – the leadership of the party, influenced by Schröder, accepted a resolution proclaiming the break with the Third International. More serious than this decision, taken outside the framework of a party congress, was the decision to work towards the 'construction of a Communist Workers' International'. The resolution was presented as an 'opinion' of the KAPD leadership:

The central committee is of the opinion that the events of the Third World-Congress in principle lead to a break with the Moscow International.

The central committee, given the necessities of the international class-struggle, sees the construction of a Communist Workers' International as the most urgent task for the revolutionary world-proletariat. The central committee is also of the opinion that the foundation, tactics and form of organisation of this KAI must be adapted to the conditions of struggle for the proletarian revolution.

The central committee declares that our policy towards the Soviet government is not determined by its present attitude. Since the Soviet government acts as a factor in the proletarian revolution, the KAPD has the duty to support it with an active solidarity. Should it leave this terrain and behave as an agent of the bourgeois revolution, it must be firmly combated by the KAPD.<sup>70</sup>

The Russian question – proletarian revolution or dual revolution – was right at the heart of the debate in the KAPD.

### 3 Gorter, the KAPD and the Building of the KAI

Gorter and the Dutch – except Pannekoek, who for political and professional reasons, retired from political activity until 1927<sup>71</sup> – were very active in the

69 KAZ (Berlin), No. 219.

70 KAZ (Berlin), No. 219.

71 Pannekoek retired from the workers' movement as much to devote himself to his work in astronomy as to, in his own words, 'orientate' himself personally in the debates in the KAPD, without belonging to a party. This conception is similar to that of Bordiga, who with-

debates in the KAPD. But, contrary to the years of 1919 and 1920, this activity proved mainly negative for the KAPD, given the confusion it dragged along with it.

### 3.1 *The Russian Question: State-Capitalism, Party and International*

The Dutch theoreticians were late in making a critical evaluation of the course followed by the Russian Revolution. Until 1920, their position was that the Russian Revolution was orientated towards communism. They carefully distinguished the politics of the Bolshevik party in the International from the economic policy which was followed by it and the state. Pannekoek affirmed that in Russia, 'Industry, centralised to a very great extent, avoids all form of exploitation': something that the Bolsheviks never claimed, given the transitory nature of the new economy. And he concluded that Russia could not endure the decadence of capitalism; on the contrary, it was 'engaged in opening the way to a new civilisation', which would make it 'the centre of the new worldwide communist order'.<sup>72</sup> If, nevertheless, Pannekoek emphasised the danger of a 'new bureaucracy', he did not foresee it bringing about the counter-revolution. The danger of counter-revolution would come, essentially, from the outside: the insertion of the Soviet state into a *modus vivendi* with world-capitalism, through diplomacy. State-capitalism was not at issue at all. For Gorter and Pannekoek, the Russian Revolution was proletarian in the same way as the Bolshevik party.

However, very early on, from 1918 Gorter thought that the peasantry embodied the mortal danger to the Russian Revolution. In a letter to Pannekoek, he wrote: 'The greatest danger for Soviet Russia is not the counter-revolution, and perhaps not even the Entente, but the peasants'.<sup>73</sup> This obsession with the peasantry as the only counter-revolutionary factor became apparent in 1921 – after the crushing of the Kronstadt workers' and sailors' revolt, and the NEP – in the pamphlet *The Moscow International*, published by the KAPD.<sup>74</sup> Gorter's analysis of the nature of the Russian state and the Comintern was purely phenomeno-

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drew from the revolutionary movement for fifteen years. But Pannekoek theorised this retreat from militant-activity: 'I consider the party-form and the conception of belonging to a party to be, in large part, a survival of the old socialist period of the workers' movement, which, while inevitable in certain respects, is, however, totally harmful. For these reasons I remain outside [the KAPN]' (Letter to the secretary of the KAPN, 12 March 1927, in Canne Meijer Archives, map 37, IISG, Amsterdam).

72 In Bricianer 1969 p. 193.

73 Quoted by Gorter 1921c, p. 5.

74 Gorter 1921c. The text of the pamphlet was also published in *Proletarier*, theoretical organ of the KAPD, No. 7, July 1921.

logical. According to him, the Russian state had become 'petty-bourgeois', just like the Third International. The Russian Revolution became a dual revolution, 'in a small part, proletarian-communist; for the greater part, democratic-peasant'. Such an analysis, which was over-hasty, to say the least, was poles apart from Marxism. The peasantry, like the petty-bourgeoisie in general, does not constitute a veritable class, but a collection of heterogeneous strata, oscillating between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. If history is punctuated by innumerable peasant-revolts, they have never resulted in a peasant-revolution building its own state. Marxism recognises only two forms of state under capitalism: the bourgeois state, and the transitional state under proletarian control. The proletarian revolution can degenerate, until it disappears, but in no case can it be transformed into a bourgeois revolution. All the Marxists of the time, Gorter and Pannekoek included, had insisted, along with Rosa Luxemburg, that the era of bourgeois revolutions was over. But they never envisaged the possibility of a 'petty-bourgeois' revolution. As for the petty-bourgeois character of the Comintern, it seemed difficult to imagine that the petty-bourgeoisie, a collection of strata attached to their own nation, could devote themselves to an international. It is true that the Comintern was to lend credit to this idea, which was 'new' to the Marxist camp, by forming a Peasant-International.<sup>75</sup>

A more serious discussion on the Russian question developed in the KAPD in preparation for the party's extraordinary congress. It brought out a pamphlet, written by a member of the central committee, the young Dr. Adolf Dethmann,<sup>76</sup> responsible for the 'party's scientific school', and linked to the Schröder

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75 A Peasant-'International' was founded in October 1923. Called the Krestintern, it was used to practice the united front with bourgeois parties influential among the peasantry of under-developed countries.

76 Dethmann 1921. In 1922, Gorter translated and published the anonymous Dethmann's pamphlet in Dutch: see Dethmann 1922.

Adolf Dethmann (3 December 1896–6 August 1979), born in Heikendorf (Kiel); engineer. In March 1919, he published *Spartakus*, organ of the KPD for the province of Schleswig-Holstein. Expelled from the KPD (s) after the Heidelberg's congress. One of the founders of the KAPD. 17 December 1920 doctor in social sciences – thesis title: *Der Rätegedanke als Staatstheorie und seine Keime in den Schriften von Karl Marx und Friedrich Engels* –, was in charge of the 'scientific section' of the KAPD in Kiel. He came back, with discretion, to the KPD around 1925, according to the KAPD (KAZ No. 46, June 1925, 'Was der "Vulkan" zu Tage fördert'). He worked from April 1929 at the Junkers Hauptbüro (a famous aircraft-company). He became managing director of Junkers and Co. in December 1931 after Hugo Junkers had let the former directors go. He was very close to Hugo Junkers, who apparently refused any military orientation for the business, but had a commercial relationship with the Russian authorities from 1922 onwards. After the Nazis won the elections in March

and Gorter fraction: it was entitled *The Soviet government and the Third International, in tow to the international bourgeoisie*. The pamphlet, which was brought out in August – which left little time to discuss it seriously before the congress in September – was translated into Dutch by Gorter. It served as a basic reference for the whole left-communist current, from the Dutch to the Bulgarians. Gorter made extensive use of its theses to lay the foundations of the KAI.<sup>77</sup>

To explain the counter-revolutionary course followed by the state and applied by the Bolshevik party, the KAPD pamphlet defined the Russian revolution as a dual revolution: bourgeois and proletarian at the same time. This theory, which was widely adopted and developed by the ‘Bordigist’ current after 1945,<sup>78</sup> could be based on texts by Lenin and the Bolsheviks, which implicitly attributed a dual nature to the revolution: ‘bourgeois-democratic’ and ‘proletarian’.<sup>79</sup> The revolution was a dual one, because, on the one hand, it suppressed feudalism to introduce capitalism to the countryside; on the other, the proletariat suppressed capitalism in the towns: ‘The large towns passed from capitalism to socialism, the open countryside from feudalism to capitalism. In the large towns, a proletarian revolution was accomplished; in the country, the bourgeois revolution’.<sup>80</sup>

The Russian Revolution was thus, according to the KAPD, a ‘compromise between two revolutions’.<sup>81</sup> The ‘serfs’ in the countryside were allied with the proletariat against the ‘feudal nobility’. And these same ‘serfs’ constituted the ‘bourgeois class’ by occupying the land. This conception was divorced from his-

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1933, Dethmann was arrested by the Gestapo, suspected of a ‘communist policy’ within the company, and released two months later, forbidden from returning to Junkers. He managed to find a job in a scientific library. After 1945, he came back to the KPD in the Western Zone (Schleswig-Holstein). Denounced as ‘Titoist’, he was expelled from the party in around 1948. In 1951 he joined the *Unabhängige Arbeiterpartei* (‘Independent Workers’ Party’), an ephemeral 1950s Trotskyist group, subsidised by Yugoslav and American state-agencies. Bookseller to Hamburg, Dethmann campaigned in 1954 so that the sale of *Mein Kampf* would be legally prohibited in the bookshops for young people under age 18. [See Detlef 2001; *Der Spiegel*, no. 42, 10 Nov. 1954.]

77 KAPD 1923a.

78 Bourrinet 1999.

79 Lenin wrote, for example: ‘... We are advancing towards the socialist revolution consciously, firmly and unswervingly, knowing that it is not separated from the bourgeois-democratic revolution by a Chinese Wall ...’ Further on he talks of the ‘bourgeois-democratic content of the revolution’ in which ‘the social relations (system, institutions) of the country are purged of medievalism, serfdom, feudalism’. Lenin 1976, pp. 51–2.

80 Dethmann 1921, p. 7.

81 Dethmann 1921, p. 17.

torical reality, serfdom having been abolished since the end of the nineteenth century and the countryside widely penetrated by capitalism since Stolypin. On the other hand, the immense majority of the peasantry were too economically backward to be considered as a bourgeoisie. The KAPD looked for the bourgeoisie where they were not to be found. The bureaucracy was analysed in terms of its social composition, and not of its function in the relations of production: the bureaucracy was the expression of the petty-bourgeoisie on the basis of an economy of scarcity, and not of a bourgeois function.

As opposed to the council-communism of the 1930s, the KAPD and Gorter gave no support to the idea that the Russian Revolution could only have been bourgeois. This could only have been a regression, an involution; the era of proletarian revolution was on the agenda in Russia, but had been liquidated to the benefit of the bourgeois state, corresponding to the lower phase of the bourgeois revolution:<sup>82</sup> 'Proletarian Soviet Russia is starting to be transformed into a bourgeois state';<sup>83</sup> 'The Russian proletariat has been dispossessed of its state ...'<sup>84</sup>

The consequence was that Soviet Russia must 'reach a point of supporting the international counter-revolution'.<sup>85</sup> This position called into question the defence of Soviet Russia. This defence was 'to be considered case-by-case': its government must be supported by the world-proletariat on the condition that 'it fought with the Russian industrial proletariat against the common enemy: the feudal nobility; it must be fought when it represents the interests of the bourgeoisie and the peasantry against the Russian proletariat'.<sup>86</sup>

In spite of the counter-revolution, the KAPD strongly affirmed that the lessons of the Russian proletarian revolution remained valid worldwide; they must be applied anew in the future Russian revolution:

The revolutionary proletariat of the entire world owes the Russian proletariat an infinite debt. The Russian proletariat has shown it the ways and the methods (mass-strike and insurrection) that open the way to political power; at the same time, it has shown the form of the proletarian state: the

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82 The militants of the KAPD protested at the congress of September 1921 against a schematic vision of 'stages' of the revolution; thus Carl Happ, a KAP official in Hamburg, commented: 'The schematic theory of stages, feudalism, capitalism, communism, I consider it a barren and accursed theory ...' Quoted in Klockner (ed.) 1981, pp. 96–9.

83 Dethmann 1921, p. 15.

84 Dethmann 1921, p. 22.

85 Dethmann 1921, *ibid.*

86 Dethmann 1921, p. 25.

workers' councils. That is the great action, that is the incommensurable success of the Russian Revolution!<sup>87</sup>

The second point addressed by Dethmann's pamphlet was the attitude that the KAPD should adopt towards the Russian Communist Party. This remained uncertain. On the one hand, implicitly, the Bolshevik party, although in degeneration, was considered capable of producing proletarian fractions: the KAPD relied heavily on the Workers' Opposition for the birth, through a split, of a second proletarian party. On the other hand, the Russian party appeared as having definitively passed to the bourgeois camp. But in a strange way – and here, the influence of Gorter was felt – Lenin appeared to the KAPD as 'the representative of the Russian peasants, in other words, the international bourgeoisie'.<sup>88</sup>

The same incomprehension of the gradual process of degeneration was found in its analysis of the Third International. Its definitive death was proclaimed, because of its total submission to the Russian bourgeois state:

The Third International has been lost to the world-proletarian revolution. It finds itself, like the Second International, in the hands of the bourgeoisie. The entire difference between the two consists only of this: the Second International's particular national parties depend on their particular bourgeois states. On the contrary, the Third International in its totality depends on a single bourgeois state.<sup>89</sup>

More serious was the fact that the KAPD considered all the sections of the Comintern as lost. This implied that it could not give birth to revolutionary fractions from among its ranks, and nor could its national sections. If these 'particular sections' of the Comintern were only 'auxiliary forces in the hands of the bourgeois Soviet government'<sup>90</sup> then the KAPD's whole policy of forming

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87 Dethmann 1921, p. 28.

Pannekoek defended the 'proletarian character' of the revolution; he also emphasised the 'proletarian role' of the Bolshevik party: 'The action of the Bolsheviks is incommensurably significant for the revolution in Western Europe. They have first, by taking political power, given an example to the proletariat of the entire world ... By their praxis they have posed the great principles of communism: dictatorship of the proletariat and the system of soviets or councils ...' In *Proletarier*, No. 6, June 1921, 'Sowjet Rußland und der west-europäische Kommunismus'.

88 Dethmann 1921 p. 29.

89 Dethmann 1921, p. 30.

90 Dethmann 1921, p. 32.

opposition-groups collapsed. In contradiction with reality, the Belgian, Mexican and Italian parties were made to appear as 'auxiliary-troops' in the service of the reconstruction of Russian capital. In fact, this was nothing but a theoretical justification for the voluntarist construction of a Fourth International.

### 3.2 *The Extraordinary Congress of the KAPD (11–14 September 1921), and the Question of Forming the KAI*

The KAPD congress unanimously repudiated the Third Congress, including the 'Greater Berlin' delegates, opposed to the party-leadership. They proclaimed their immediate exit from the Comintern as a sympathiser-party. The congress endorsed the KAPD delegates' attitude and decided to address a manifesto to the proletarians of the whole world. Lastly, it approved the principle of conditional solidarity with the Russian state.<sup>91</sup>

But the question of the rapid foundation of a Communist Workers' International was posed without being resolved. Since July, Gorter had been in Berlin, where he would stay at least until the time of the congress in order to exercise all the influence he could. He tried to overcome Berlin's opposition,<sup>92</sup> and the hesitations of Schröder, who was pessimistic.<sup>93</sup> On 16 August, Gorter spoke energetically for the formation of a new communist international at a session of the enlarged central committee of the KAPD. Berlin pronounced itself resolutely against, while the other districts remained hesitant, considering this as 'desirable'.<sup>94</sup> For Berlin, it was not a question of denying the KAI's necessity, but of waiting for the moment when it arose 'from below': in no case could such a body be 'imposed from above'.

The extraordinary congress did not allow the development of total clarity within the party. Gorter, who had come flanked by three other Dutch delegates,<sup>95</sup> simultaneously declared in his long interventions that 'the situation

91 Klockner (ed.) 1981, pp. 122–3.

92 Gorter seems to have been under constant surveillance by the German police, as evidenced by a police-report dated 23 August. Ritter 1979, RK 51.

93 Ritter 1979, RK 50. More cautious than Gorter, Schröder had envisaged first holding a conference of opposition-groups, and only afterwards examining what should be the form of the international regroupment.

94 Clemens Klockner, in the preface to Klockner (ed.) 1981, pp. 11–42.

95 There were 76 delegates and 180 guests at the congress, whose meeting-place changed each day. Apart from Gorter, the Dutch delegation consisted of Jansen and Meer. Jansen may have been the KAPN member J.J. Janssen (1890–1961) (See Collection Canne Meijer). It would have been strange for the painter Johannes Proost (1882–1942), 'Jansen', delegate to the Second Congress of the Comintern (along with Ceton, De Visser and Willem van

[was] still just as revolutionary as it was a few years ago'; and, on the other hand, that the fight for the KAI would be 'infinitely difficult'.<sup>96</sup> Since they could only attempt to go 'against the current', what influence could a KAI formed during the advance of counter-revolution have? What credibility could be given to the presenter, Dethmann, who declared that the KAI would be constituted in countries linked to the German bourgeois state? The opposition-delegates were far from having a clear vision. Some supported the idea that the KAI could not be constituted in the underdeveloped countries, where parliamentarism, corresponding to the current phase of bourgeois revolution, could be used. Others held that the precondition for the formation of the KAI was that the Russian government withdraw from state-power.<sup>97</sup> A minority thought that a joint opposition with the revolutionary syndicalists was possible. Much clearer was the representative from Berlin, Adam Scharrer, supported by Jan Appel in a minority on the central committee.<sup>98</sup> He wisely stressed the need to let things

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Leuven), still a member of the CPH, and future apparatchik in the Comintern, to have been invited to the congress. If that was so, his presence is hard to explain.

96 Klockner (ed.) 1981, pp. 6–14.

97 Intervention by August Wülfrath (1888–1976), a metal-worker from Berlin, a member of the *Geschäftsführender Hauptausschuß* (GHA) of the KAPD. He wrote after 1926 in the KAPDist periodical *Proletarier* using the pseudonym of Friedrich Oswald. Member of the SED after 1946, he was at the head of the Potsdam Library (1950–62); died in East Berlin on June 10th, 1976.

98 Adam Scharrer (1889–1948) – pseudonyms: Adam, A. Licht – son of a shepherd, iron-worker, turner. In 1916, he served as an artilleryman on the Russian front. Mobilised as worker in Essen, then in Berlin in 1917, he participated in the large armaments-factory strikes of 1918. He had belonged to the Spartakusbund in 1918. He was a veritable pillar of the KAPD from the split in 1922 until at least 1929. From 1924, he was a proofreader at the KAPD press in Berlin (Iszdonat). He was expelled from the AAUD in 1929, but seems to have written some articles for the KAZ until 1931. He maintained contact with Paul Mattick until 1932, speaking of the 'anti-bureaucrat psychosis' of his former comrades. He wrote novels, of which some appeared through the German CP's publishing-house (Agis Verlag). In 1933, after being plunged into illegality in Berlin, he went to Prague as a refugee, quickly abandoning his revolutionary positions. He took refuge in the USSR in 1934, firstly in Moscow; then in Peredelkino, Ukraine in 1935; and finally in Tashkent in 1941–3. The Soviets published some of his novels. During the war, he worked for the Russian war-propaganda machine, in the German language, along with German writers: Theodor Plivier (1892–1955), Alfred Kurella (1895–1945), and Erich Weinert (1890–1953), president of the Stalinist *Freies Deutschland* Committee. Returning to Germany in June 1945, he worked for the new Stalinist régime in the 'cultural-services' department (*Kulturbund zur demokratischen Erneuerung Deutschlands*). He claimed that he had been 'non-party' since 1920. See Hans Harald Müller in *1WK*, Berlin, March 1975, Heft 1. Certainly, the



mature; not to found the International before left-groups had left the Comintern; and not to artificially proclaim a new International based on the KAPD.

However, despite the opposition from Berlin and Bremerhaven, the congress-delegates, particularly those from Rhineland-Westphalia, decided to approve the principle of founding the KAI. The proposal of Schröder, Dethmann and Goldstein to create an International Bureau of Information and Organisation was accepted by the majority. Gorter, Schröder, Kropf and Ivan Kolinkoiev would represent all organisations adhering to this Bureau. Such a Bureau could only serve to co-ordinate the different opposition-groups. The Schröder leadership, which completely followed Gorter in this adventure, went beyond its mandate. It was as if the KAI had already been formed: *Proletarier*, the theoretical periodical of the KAPD, became the journal of the KAI.

The most surprising thing was that the KAI was, in fact, proclaimed before having been officially formed. Moreover, the Sylvia Pankhurst group excluded from the CPGB in September 1921 announced the entrance of 500 militants – an exaggerated number – into the KAI on 8 October, with sections in London, Glasgow, Liverpool, Cardiff, Northampton, Southampton and Sheffield. In this last town, in 1922 Pankhurst's CWP formed a short-lived 'All Workers' Union'.

Along with the Bulgarians, the Sylvia Pankhurst group constituted the bulk of a Lilliputian international army. 200 militants in the Netherlands, plus a small nucleus in Yugoslavia, supported these 'large' sections of the KAI.<sup>99</sup> The opposition-groups in Belgium, Italy, France, Austria and the USA, which were said to be ready to join the KAI, had no real existence.

### 3.3 *The Denial of the Economic Struggle*

Such were the divisions between the Berlin district and the Schröder faction which controlled the Executive Committee of the party and the International

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East-German editions of his novels were silent on his membership of the KAPD. His best-known novels are *Vaterlandslose Gesellen: das erste Kriegsbuch eines Arbeiters* (1929), on the First World-War (reprinted in 1974); and *In jungen Jahren: Erlebnisroman eines Arbeiters*, on his working-class youth (reprinted in 1977). There exists a re-edition of his entire literary works: Scharrer 1979.

99 These were the 'Revolutionary Communists of Yugoslavia'. In a letter to the KAPD Congress, the opposition-group had not pronounced in favour of a KAI, but, on the contrary, for a unitary opposition-core inside the Third International: see Klockner (ed.) 1981, p. 16. The representative of the group of oppositionists, Grulović – who, while present at the congress signed the appeal for a KAI, together with the KAPD and the Bulgarians – was handed over to the police upon his return to Yugoslavia by the Yugoslavian CP centre established in Vienna. And this was solely to prevent the formation of a CP in Yugoslavia. (See KAPD 1923a, p. 20).

Bureau, that there threatened to be a split between the 'top' and the 'base' of the KAPD. However, when the split came it was not caused by the question of the formation of the KAI. It was brought on by divergences concerning intervention in immediate economic struggles, and by the bureaucratic manoeuvres of the Schröder group.

At the beginning of 1922, in January, the theoretical triumvirate of the KAI – Schröder, Goldstein and Dethmann – produced a series of articles in *Kampfruf*, organ of the Berlin AAU, on the role of the *Unionen* (AAU) in the class-struggle.<sup>100</sup> They held that, in the epoch of 'the death-crisis of capitalism', wage-struggles were 'opportunistic', and no longer made any sense. The workers organised in the AAU should struggle collectively for the revolution; struggles for demands should become a 'private affair' for each individual worker:

Reformism is the struggle within capitalism for better wages and working-conditions; in other words, the struggle for a greater share of private property. The proletarian conducts the struggle as a particular individual, in agreement with other individuals, in his interest as an individual. The trades-unions represent the interests of the particular worker within capitalism.

The AAU organises the proletarian class with one exclusive aim: the direct disappearance of capitalism as a system: it should not take into consideration nor represent the personal interests of the individual worker within capitalism ... When a Unionist is engaged in a capitalist enterprise, he makes a private contract as an individual worker with the head of the enterprise. Should he find himself with insufficient pay to maintain his simple material existence, then he goes anew to see his employer, as an individual worker, to demand a change in his private contract under the form of an improvement in his conditions of pay and work ... If the employer does not agree, then the Unionist, as an individual worker in the enterprise, has at his disposal a series of means for imposing his demands, for example the strike and passive resistance.<sup>101</sup>

This conception, which is foreign to Marxism, is not new. It is related to Proudhonism, which denied the need for economic wage-struggles, and to individualist anarchism, which advocated the individual strike and resistance against

100 Series of articles by Dethmann: *Kampfruf* ('Appeal to struggle'), Nos. 4, 5, 6 and 8: 'Die Union, was sie ist und was sie sein soll'.

101 KAPD 1923a, pp. 8–9.

capitalist exploitation. The Schröder-Dethmann-Goldstein tendency – with somewhat lukewarm support from the Dutch and Gorter<sup>102</sup> – was giving in to impatience. It justified the existence of the KAI theoretically by pretending that the only item on the agenda was the revolutionary struggle for the conquest of power. As so often in the history of the revolutionary movement, this impatience developed during the course of an ebb in the class-struggle and was based on intellectuals who tended to underestimate, if not despise, the very material reality of the daily struggle for economic demands. These elements, ‘disappointed’ by the workers who had been idealised when the revolutionary class-struggle was visible, considered that these same workers were ‘egoists’ in struggling for their material demands. They could only ‘demand’ a ‘larger share of private property’. They constituted a sort of ‘class for capital’,<sup>103</sup> if they lowered themselves to struggles for pay, which were defined as ‘opportunist’ and ‘reformist’.

According to the opponents of the Schröder–Dethmann–Goldstein tendency, the rejection of economic struggles and the theory of the ‘individual worker’ advanced by this fraction of the KAPD, which in effect controlled the leadership, had damaging and even destructive consequences for the life of the party and the revolution:

- The separation between economic and revolutionary struggles condemned the KAPD to exist as a party only in periods of open revolutionary struggle. In a period of retreat, it had no more than a propaganda-function and was transformed into a mere circle, not intervening in the class-struggle as an organisation and trying to give a direction to this struggle. The AAU, similarly, had no function other than propaganda for the revolution, since, according to the conception of the future Essen tendency, the ‘Unionists’ could only intervene individually in the economic struggles. The result was that the

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102 In 1923, Gorter found it ‘a great pity’ that the Essen leadership left its members ‘to conduct themselves as individuals in wage-struggles’, thus making its attitude ‘equivocal’, but he considered them to be correct theoretically (KAPD 1923a, p. 10). Gorter is not against wage-struggles here, whereas the Essen tendency had the slogan ‘Down with wage-struggles!’, in its press and even in leaflets.

103 This theory of a ‘class for capital’ was developed, or rather taken up again, in the 1970s by some intellectuals from an ‘ultra-left’ milieu close to the periodical *Invariance* in France. This publication proclaimed the abandonment of all economic struggle, which could only be a ‘struggle for capital’ by a ‘class for capital’. The proletariat, according to them, must ‘negate itself’ as a wage-earning class. These individuals and groups rapidly disappeared at the end of the 1970s.

AAU was nothing more than a second party; and, as such, was useless. This was the whole ambiguity of the existence of *Unionen*, which were political organisations and organisations of economic struggle at the same time.<sup>104</sup>

- If the KAPD and AAU followed a policy of ‘neutrality’ towards economic struggles, they risked objectively playing the role of strike-breakers. ‘Neutrality’ faced with the outbreak of economic strikes became ‘neutrality’ in the face of the class-enemy.<sup>105</sup> Lastly, if the workers were to heed the advice of the Schröder tendency and abandon economic struggles, that would be a definite blow in the sense of a more certain defeat of the working class and the triumph of the counter-revolution. The principal administration-committee (*Geschäftsführender Hauptausschuß*, or GHA), led by the Berlin opposition, underlined this point energetically: ‘Workers who are incapable of leading such struggles, and when in conflict with capital give in to cowardice, are not capable of leading the struggle for power’.<sup>106</sup>
- Lastly, in an indirect way, the Schröder tendency adopted an ambiguous attitude on the nature of the trades-unions, denounced as counter-revolutionary by the communist left. If the unions were capable of ‘representing the interests of the particular worker’, they retained a proletarian nature. This was in contradiction with the theory of the KAPD and the Dutch, who had justified the struggle against the unions by the fact that in the epoch of the decline of capitalism, since 1914, the trade-union form could no longer defend the elementary economic interests of the workers. The disquiet in the GHA and the Berlin district, which saw Social-Democratic conceptions coming back in through the window after being chased out of the door, was not without foundation. Some leaders of the future Essen tendency were not long in rejoining the SPD or the KPD (see below).

## 4 The Split in the KAPD and Its International Consequences

### 4.1 *The March 1922 Split*

In a few months, the Berlin district and the GHA had succeeded in winning over the majority of the party. Its militants were more aware of the disturbing

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104 The Essen tendency, which published *KAZ* and proclaimed itself as the KAPD, was coherent within the terms of its own logic: at the end of the 1920s, it announced the dissolution of its own *Union*.

105 *Der Kampfzettel*, No. 21, February 1922, ‘Zur Reichskonferenz der Allgemeinen Arbeiter Union’.

106 *KAZ* (Berlin), No. 21, February 1922, ‘Leitsätze zur Taktik der KAPD und AAU’.

consequences of the theory of the 'individual worker' than of the proposal to form the KAI. The politics of the Schröder group had been disastrous for the KAPD. In only a few months, its membership had fallen from 40,000 to less than 15,000. Many workers had left the party, to retire from political activity, to return to the KPD, to work only in the AAU, or, more often, to adhere to the recently-formed rival *Union*, influenced by Rühle, the AAU-*Einheit* (unitary), which formally split from the AAU after the June 1921 Berlin Conference.<sup>107</sup>

But if the Schröder tendency found itself in the minority, it had the majority in the supreme organ of the KAPD: the central committee (*Zentralausschuß*), composed of representatives of the different economic districts (regions) of the party. Through an aberrant clause in the statutes, each district, whatever its size, had one mandate. The numerous small sections were thus over-represented in the central committee.

Berlin, which comprised nearly half the KAPD membership, thus only had one of the 12 mandates, since there were 12 districts. The central committee plus the GHA (nine members) formed the enlarged central committee, supreme organ of the KAPD.<sup>108</sup> The Schröder group, which directed the International Bureau at the same time, was assured of maintaining its majority, relying on

107 The AAU-E of Rühle and Pfemfert, rival to the AAU, had absorbed, from October 1921, the majority of the militants who left the KAPD. The AAU-E had about 60,000 members in 1922, more than the AAU, which had 12,000. But according to a confidential police-report, in July 1922 the KAPD (Berlin tendency) still had 18,400 members, 86 local sections, and the KAZ a print-run of 30,000 copies; the *Kampfzettel* (AAUD), a print-run of 64,000 copies actually sold. R134/18, in Ritter 1979.

108 It was required that a commission should be formed during the sessions of the central committee in order to verify the mandates. This was all the more necessary, given the number of organs taking part. Among those present were the GHA; the Bureau of Information and Organisation of the KAI; the principal enlarged committee (*Erweiterter Hauptausschuß*), a sort of political committee not concerned with the management of daily business; the *Zentrale* of the Berlin KAPD; the KAZ editors and the press-commission; the representatives of the youth (KAJ) of the *Reich* and of Berlin; the representatives of the VRUK (commission of support to political prisoners of the KAP/AAU); the representatives of the AAU (Berlin and *Reich*); and lastly, some members of the Berlin district. The 12 districts (regions) of the KAPD were, of course, also included. In total, 33 persons were present at the time of the session of 5–6 March. We can see the complexity of the organisation of a revolutionary party like the KAPD. Unfortunately, we cannot define the organisational competence of the central organs (GHA, *Zentrale* of Berlin, Principal Enlarged Committee). It is enough to specify that the following had a mandate, and thus a right to vote: the 12 districts, the International Bureau, the GHA, the *Erweiterter Hauptausschuß*, and the Berlin *Zentrale*. This made 20 mandates altogether. Dethmann – the theoretician of

the small sections that it was usually able to manipulate. When the enlarged central committee met on 5 March, Berlin and the GHA therefore proposed a change in the mode of representation: one mandate per hundred members of the KAPD, instead of one for each district. This proposal was rejected by seven votes to five. Only the districts voted; the GHA abstained in order not to violate 'the principles of proletarian democracy', by using this same method in order to vote to change it.<sup>109</sup> The result was to obtain an artificial majority for the Schröder leadership. The latter could, by a simple majority vote, arrange the holding of a conference in April 1922 for the immediate foundation of the KAI (14 for and five against) without first calling a party-congress. Lastly was the extremely serious rejection of wage-struggles by the enlarged central committee, as 'counter-revolutionary'.

Faced with this situation, the Berlin district deposed the Berlin *Zentrale* and excluded Schröder, Goldstein, Reichenbach, Emil Sach,<sup>110</sup> Walter Kalbitzer, Otto Gottberg and Adolf Dethmann. Karl Schröder and his partisans immediately constituted a new GHA which was based in Essen, in the Rhineland.<sup>111</sup> The latter decreed that the Berlin district was 'excluded from the party' for 'reformism'. A small minority of 450 was allowed to exclude 2,000 members of the KAPD. The split was complete between the Berlin tendency, which had 2,000 militants in the whole of Germany, and the Essen tendency, very much in the minority, but strong, above all, in the Rhineland and Central Germany. Of 12,000 AAU members in Berlin, only 600 rallied to the Essen tendency. The split was catastrophic for the KAPD: its membership had fallen again. Still worse was the existence, side-by-side, of two KAPDs, with two papers with the same title; and two AAUs, distributing *Kampfzettel*. It introduced political customs which would later meet with success in the 'Bordigist' current.<sup>112</sup>

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'the individual worker' – 'illegally' held mandates from five districts. With an *Erweiterter Hauptschuß*, a *Zentrale*, and seven districts supporting the Schröder tendency, it was easy to manipulate the vote and so to 'swamp' the real majority of the party.

109 See KAZ (Berlin), Nos. 18–21, 1922; KAZ (Essen), No. 1, March 1922.

110 Pseudonym: Erdmann.

111 Schröder and his friends were able to depose the GHA of Berlin all-too 'legally', since the statutes of the KAPD gave the Berlin *Zentrale* the right to revoke the nine individual members, 'under the condition of approval by the next party-congress', and replace them by others.

112 According to the Berlin tendency, the Essen KAP used methods unworthy of a revolutionary organisation. Essen used slander, claiming that Russian roubles were flooding into the Berlin tendency, and that the Berlin district was 'a nest of informers': KAZ (Berlin), No. 41, 1922. Essen did not hesitate to seize the organisation's equipment, and tried to bribe the

The Essen tendency formed the KAI, at a founding conference from 2–6 April. The only ‘foreign’ group participating was the Dutch KAP. The KAI presented itself as a centralised organisation. Organisationally, it copied the Comintern. Its Executive was composed of a small Bureau, the International Secretariat, responsible to the international congress, and an enlarged Bureau, composed of the representatives of the national sections, to be chosen and revoked by them.<sup>113</sup> The concern not to place the KAI under the control of the Essen tendency was concretised through the decision to select the Executive Bureau at each international congress.<sup>114</sup> Aware of criticisms from Berlin, the Essen tendency decided that the number of mandates held by the different constituent ‘parties’ of the KAI would be determined by the international congress. An extraordinary congress had to be called by a majority of national sections. These arrangements would have been valuable if the KAI actually represented a real International with real national parties. This was far from being the case. The KAI was, in fact, a provisional bureau with several national groups.<sup>115</sup>

#### 4.2 *Gorter and the Essen Current*

Gorter was the KAI’s only real theoretician. Schröder and his friends were far from having Gorter’s stature.<sup>116</sup> It was Gorter who gave the Essen tendency its programme, in the form of a pamphlet: *The Communist Workers’ International*. The pamphlet, albeit often confused, brought together the elements of the

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Düsseldorf comrades to turn *Klassenkampf* against Berlin: *KAZ* (Berlin), No. 16. Finally, militants in Essen attacked Berlin supporters in the town with bludgeons: *KAZ* (Berlin), No. 41, 1922. The mania for proclaiming oneself ‘the’ party, with the same name, after each split, was adopted later by the Italian ‘Bordigists’. In Italy today there are at least three ‘International Communist Parties’ and one Internationalist Communist Party claiming to represent the Italian communist left.

113 Dethmann had proposed that the KAI’s Executive should be responsible as a whole before the congress, and that the latter alone should have the right to revoke its members, ‘in order that they should not represent the particular conception of their national party’. This meant that until the next congress, the Executive could impose a policy that ran contrary to the organisation’s political orientations, without the national parties being able to revoke and replace their delegates: see KAPD 1923a, pp. 12–13.

114 *Proletarier*, April 1922, Berlin, ‘Die Thesen des 1. Kongresses der KAI’. After the split, the Essen tendency kept the KAPD’s theoretical journal. From November 1924, the Berlin tendency published its own *Proletarier*.

115 The British and Bulgarian organisations only joined the KAI officially some time later. In 1922, the KAI was, in reality, made up of the KAPN and the Essen tendency alone.

116 After 1922, Karl Schröder wrote very little. He was demoralised, and only took a limited part in militant-activity in the KAI leadership until 1924, when he left it.

KAI's programme. Although he adopted the theory of the 'dual revolution', Gorter took the Russian Revolution as his point of departure. Contrary to the councilists, he strongly insisted on the role played by the Bolsheviks in 1917, 'as the most determined and most conscious organisation'. Criticism of the Bolsheviks must be from a class-, not a 'Menshevik, viewpoint': 'We are the most bitter adversaries – and the KAPs in every country have always been so – of the Menshevik, Kautskyist, independent, pacifist, and so on, notion that the Russians should have stopped at the bourgeois revolution.'<sup>117</sup>

However, while he rightly denounced the dictatorship of the Bolshevik party, which he incorrectly considered a party of the bourgeois revolution, Gorter's evaluation of the Russian Revolution should be treated with caution. According to Gorter, the Bolsheviks should have prevented the formation of peasant soviets, and refused land-redistribution and the enlistment of peasants in the Red Army. Once again defending his position on Brest-Litovsk, he described the latter as 'capitalist-democratic'. Finally, he considered that the Russian Revolution had taken 'proletarian-communist measures', like the formation of the soviets and the enrolment of workers in the Red Army: 'The appeals from Russia and the Third International for revolution, civil war, the formation of workers' and soldiers' councils and of a Red Army, were proletarian and communist'.<sup>118</sup> But, ultimately, 'no class-dictatorship was possible (in Russia), for the good reason that the proletariat was too weak and the peasantry too powerful'.<sup>119</sup>

Gorter's real contribution, at the end of his evolution from the *Response to Comrade Lenin* onwards, was to show that the proletarian revolution is on the agenda even in the most backward countries. Clearly rejecting the slogans of 'the right of peoples to self determination', and 'national liberation', Gorter insisted that communists' tactics were no longer the same as when the *Communist Manifesto* was written.<sup>120</sup> Particularly in Asia, a true International should call the proletariat 'to separate immediately from the bourgeois parties and take a completely independent position'. Although Gorter did not completely reject the possibility of bourgeois revolutions in the epoch of 'capitalism's mortal crisis', he refused to accept that a proletarian revolution could emerge from a bourgeois one. Workers in Asia could only count on their own strength, and could only ally themselves with the proletariat of the industrialised countries. The role of an International is to apply the same principles

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<sup>117</sup> Gorter 1974b, p. 34.

<sup>118</sup> Gorter 1974b, p. 45.

<sup>119</sup> Gorter 1974b, p. 38.

<sup>120</sup> Gorter 1974b, p. 48.



and the same tactics throughout the world. Unlike the Berlin tendency, which thought it impossible to form a KAP in the underdeveloped countries, and even contrary to the Essen tendency, which only thought it possible in countries tied to Germany, Gorter argued forcefully that revolutionary parties had to appear in every country in the world, with the same communist principles: '[the KAI] wants, through new organisations, to transform every worker in Europe, America, Africa, Asia, and Australia into a conscious communist'.<sup>121</sup>

Nonetheless, the KAI's programme suffered from an immense pessimism, which rendered the existence of a new International still more doubtful. Gorter considered that the vast majority of workers throughout the world were enemies of the revolution:

The European workers under the guidance of the Third International are not alone in being enemies of the world-revolution; the same is true now for the workers in Asia ... We can calmly declare that the world-proletariat as a whole has, up to now, been hostile to communism. Moreover, all the classes of all the capitalist states are enemies of the revolution.<sup>122</sup>

This was to declare the battle lost before having fought it. And if the real communists were only a minority, then the world-revolution was lost and an International, in a period of counter-revolution, was a nonsense. Gorter's voluntarism was born of pessimism.

How, then, are we to believe that Gorter and the Essen tendency were confidently expecting 'a rapid renaissance of the revolution', especially in Germany? It was difficult to accord any credibility to Gorter when he declared, at the cost of flagrant self-contradiction, that the KAI was meant to be, at one and the same time, a small nucleus and an organisation of hundreds of thousands of workers, the *Unionen* even bringing together millions!<sup>123</sup>

In reality, Gorter soon separated from the Essen tendency, to place himself 'outside the fractions'. In one of his last pamphlets, published in 1923, though he supported the Essen tendency theoretically, Gorter declared his intention of working for the reunification of the two opposing KAPDs. But this was to be considered 'as soon as there is a resurgence of revolutionary struggles'!<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Gorter 1974b, p. 56.

<sup>122</sup> Gorter 1974b, pp. 47, 50.

<sup>123</sup> Gorter 1921b.

<sup>124</sup> Gorter 1923, p. 20. Gorter signed the content of the pamphlet in a personal capacity, an indication of how isolated he found himself.

### 4.3 *The Decomposition of the Essen Tendency*

The KAPD's split in March 1922 had disastrous effects within the groups that made up the KAI, which either endured, or disappeared as fast as they had been established.

In the Bulgarian KAP, numerically the strongest of the KAI, there was a no holds barred struggle between the Sofia tendency, attached to Essen, and the more workerist Varna tendency, close to Berlin. At first, the Bulgarian KAP had been very reticent about the KAI; in a letter of 25 January 1922, the Sofia organisation refused to send a delegate to the coming KAI congress.<sup>125</sup> Thereafter, it seems that – contrary to Berlin's claims that there were two KAPs, each publishing its own *Rabotchnitcheska Iskra* – the KAP split not into two parties, but into two groups which coexisted within the same party.<sup>126</sup> Both groups joined the KAI, but a strong minority within the Varna tendency remained in contact with the Berlin KAPD, similarly to the Netherlands (see below).<sup>127</sup> The result was great confusion in the KAP, where the split caused by the formation of the KAI still-further encouraged localism and personal antagonisms. Although it emerged intact from the bloody confrontations of September 1923, the KAP

125 Canne Meijer Archives, IISG Amsterdam, map 240.

126 KAZ (Essen tendency), but edited by Emil Sach (KAI Executive) in Berlin, No. 14, August 1922, 'Aus der Internationale'. Other names of KAI, KAPD and AAU 'leaders' appear in the Collection Canne Meijer, between 1921 and 1932: Karl Schröder (KAI Executive), Käthe Friedländer (KAI Executive), Hugo Fichtmann (1902–43) and Leo Fichtmann (1873–1942) (KAI, Berlin) [this last, born in Elbing/Elbląg, West Prussia/Poland, was killed on 29/5/1942 in Sachsenhausen as 'jew hostage', after the liquidation of Heydrich], Wilhelm Passlack (KAI, Essen), Walter Dolling (1896?–1965?; Essen), Otto Gottberg (1884–1960; KAPD treasurer, Hannover, then Frankfurt and Magdeburg; returned to the Berlin KAPD; pseudonym: Ackermann), Christian Rock (Essen), Hugo Öhlschläger (Mühlheim), Peter Berge (1886–?; Essen), Otto Arendt (KAI Executive), Walter Arendt (1894–1972), Gustav Herrmann (KAI, Berlin), Walter Kalbitzer (1880–?; Essen), August Schwes (Bremen), Gustav Sabath (31/03/1903–1980?), Ali Baset Salim, Moschev (Sofia), Lydia E. Mattern, Karl Arnold (Berlin), Walter Eckardt; Kurt Kuschevski (Berlin), Schönbeck, Oskar Walz (1904–93) (Berlin-Pankow), for the German Unionist movement. In these archives and in the *Workers' Dreadnought*, the names of W.S. Findlay, Nora Smyth, and Sylvia Pankhurst, for the Communist Workers' Movement of England, and also George Garrett, Henry Sara (1886–1953; one of the future founders of the British Trotskyist movement, after 1929), F. Brimley, T. Hodson, Albert Mack, S.P. Viant, and Janet Grove.

127 The Varna tendency sent a delegate to the Berlin KAPD. This was the student Krum (Georgi) Jäkov (or Zhekov, in English transliteration), who from 1924 wrote for *Proletarian* in Berlin. He used the pseudonyms Burg, Charlotte Burg, or Burger (according to Alfred Weiland, an old member of the Berlin KAPD, in 'Mitteilung von Alfred Weiland', no date, two pages, Freie Universität, Library, Weiland Archives, Berlin).

seems not to have survived the terrible repression that followed the terrorist-action carried out by the Bulgarian CP in April 1925.<sup>128</sup>

Sylvia Pankhurst's Communist Workers' Party (CWP), formed from sections expelled from the CPGB and attached to the KAI, tried to imitate the KAPD by artificially forming 'All Workers' Unions'. The CWP seems to have had contacts in India and South Africa. At least, this was what the KAI claimed in Berlin. But the organisation's theoretical weakness and localism coloured with anarchism got the better of it in 1924. All that remained was the Glasgow group 'The Commune' led by Guy Aldred, situated somewhere between Bakunin and 'council-communism' (see Chapter Six).

The existence of a Russian KAP, much trumpeted by the Essen tendency, appears to have been a bluff. In fact, it consisted of two Russians, who lived in Berlin and translated documents for the KAI.<sup>129</sup> The Berlin KAPD noted

128 The Bulgarian CP's putsch of September 1923 left thousands dead. In April 1925, the Bulgarian Communist Party descended into terrorism. Its military centre blew up the Sveta Nedelya cathedral in Sofia, killing a hundred members of the state-apparatus. The repression was terrible: thousands of executions over several months, including an important leader of the BCP, Nikola Shablin, many anarchists – very active in Bulgaria – and left-communist dissents such as Ivan Ganchev. In 1927, the KAI still had contacts with the Bulgarian communist left, or what remained of it, among others, Ivan Kolinkoev (leader of the Varna tendency since 1922; teacher in Burgas), and Georgi Christov, from Plovdiv. (See map 240, in Collectie Canne Meijer, IISG).

Ivan Kolinkoev (1876–1952), born in Kazanlak, teacher in a Burgas high school, probably in French, was a member of the Bulgarian Social Democracy (BRSDP) from 1900, in charge of the local section in Burgas. He was secretary of the CC of the BRSDP (1906–14); organisational secretary in Burgas between 1918 and 1920, and editor of the theoretical periodical *Novo Vremie* ('New Times'), organ of the BCP, published from 1919. In 1920, together with Dimitar Nedyalkov and others, he wrote an open letter to the leading bodies of the party, criticising parliamentary tactics: see Kolinkoev and Nedyalkov 1920. He was expelled from the BCP in 1920, as 'Iskrist', and was the dominant figure of the Varna tendency. After 1927, he contributed to the foundation of the BRP (*Balgarska Rabotnitcheska Partiya*, or 'Bulgarian Workers' Party', a legal cover for the CP) in Burgas. He was interned in a *lager* (Khristo Pole) in 1941–2. He died in September 1952 in Svishchov. (See *Entsiklopediya Balgariya* 1978–88.)

129 See KAPD 1923a, pp. 17–19, a pamphlet of the Berlin KAPD. The two Russians in question were, perhaps, Kropf and Basil Ivanovich Ruminov. The former is cited in a German police-report (Ritter 1979, RK 57 In., 11 October 1921) as being a member of the KAI's information-bureau at the end of 1921. The second was the husband of Käthe Friedländer, who played a leading role in the KAI's international work. His name also appears spelt 'Ramanov' in letters in the Canne Meijer archives, whence the name Rumanova, which in the correspondence seems to refer to Käthe Friedländer. She (Katja, in Russian) and 'Raminov' – in

ironically that the KAI had a strong tendency to build Potemkin villages.<sup>130</sup> Miasnikov's Workers' Group was more real. Strictly clandestine, it nonetheless considered itself as an external fraction of the Bolshevik party, 'in order to exercise decisive pressure on the ruling group of the party itself'.<sup>131</sup> It was attached to the KAI, but did not long survive the attentions of the *Cheka*.

In Austria, the proclamation of a KAP in 1924 was another 'Potemkin village'. The militants of this 'party', whose press was printed in Berlin, could be counted on the fingers of one hand, and it soon disappeared.<sup>132</sup>

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fact her husband Vassili Ruminov (1894–?) – were excluded from international work in January 1925, and then from the KAI in autumn 1925, as attested by a circular of 4 March 1926 (map 241/1, Canne Meijer archives) entitled 'Warrant for arrest'. Both were excluded 'for their reformist attitude, links with groups of the Third International, and betrayal of the organisation'. She and her husband were friends of the couple Franz and Cläre Jung, and probably joined the *Rote Kämpfer* group in the early 1930s. They emigrated to Paris, then to New York, where they were still living as of 1971 (See: 'Cläre Jung/Katja und Wassili Ruminoff. Rote Kämpfer, Ein Briefwechsel', in *Sklaven*, Berlin, No. 49, September–October 1998.)

From 1922, Käthe Friedländer had represented the Communist Workers' Party of Russia on the Inner Executive of the KAI. She was not formally a member of the Essen KAPD, doubtless because she worked at the Russian Trade-Mission in Berlin (map 38a/61). She worked with two other members of the Inner Executive, Walter Dolling and Karl Schröder, who were expelled in May 1924 (*Rundschreiben*, No. 3, September 1924, map 238a/60). It is difficult to determine whether the reason was her support for the theories of Rosa Luxemburg against Pannekoek (*ibid.*), or her not very clear ties to the Russian government, through her job with an institution of the Russian state.

130 Potemkin, the minister and lover of Catherine II, who during the empress's tours of the country would build brand-new villages in order to hide from her the wretched reality of the Russian peasants' existence. The KAPN claimed that there existed a section of the KAI in Africa, in fact a contact in Johannesburg (*De Communistische Arbeider*, No. 4, January 1922).

131 'Manifesto of the Workers' Group of the Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik)', 1923, published by the Essen KAPD, reproduced in Hillman 1967, translated into French in *Invariance*, No. 6, 1975. For the history of the Russian communist left, see Daniels 1969.

132 The Vienna KAZ was printed in Mülheim (in the Ruhr) by Hugo Oelschläger. According to the Austrian police-reports, the KAP had some twenty members in 1922, and many fewer in 1924. The editor of the Vienna KAZ in 1924 was Stanislaus Geiger (13/11/1901–?) (2436 BKA für Inneres, 15/3, 1922–25, Polizei-Direktion in Wien, 11 March 1924), an office-worker and member of the KPÖ in 1919. In 1927, he was a delegate to the first conference of the KPÖ opposition led by Josef Frey (1882–1957), former president of the Vienna Council of Soldiers in the 1918 Revolution, expelled from the 'party' in 1927 as a Trotskyist. In 1928, Geiger was a member of the Kurt Landau group, though still keeping in contact with the

In Germany itself, the Essen tendency was affected with the splitting virus. Its main theoretical figures left: Goldstein in 1922, then Schröder in 1924 left to join the SPD, where they formed an opposition-group with their 'old enemy' Paul Levi.<sup>133</sup> Dethmann (1896–1979) rejoined the KPD in 1925, according to the KAPD. The KAI Executive was thus considerably weakened, only to be shaken by conflicts leading to further splits, the most decisive of which took place from 1923 onwards: that year, the sections in Central Germany left the KAI to form a local group, the anti-intellectual and workerist *Kommunistischer Rätebund* ('Council-Communist Union'). Proclaiming the need to 'liquidate' the KAP, and rejecting wage-struggles in favour of a hypothetical 'union of revolutionary enterprise-organisations', this group revealed clear councilist tendencies. In 1929, the *Kommunistischer Rätebund* survived in Leipzig, as a tiny local sect (*Ernst Joël-Gruppe*). Finally, in 1925 Emil Sach, a very active worker and one of the Essen tendency's few remaining theoreticians, in turn himself split: his Berlin periodical *Vulcan* was unabashed about presenting itself as the organ of the KAI. Berlin thus had two KAIs, one publishing the *KAZ* for the Essen tendency, the other publishing *Vulcan* (edited by Paul Böhm). What was left of the Essen tendency only survived as a sect after 1929.<sup>134</sup>

The KAI was a stillborn pseudo-International. In its collapse, it dragged down militants who quickly caved in to disillusionment. Gorter's initiative was shown to be a disaster for left-communism in Germany, as well as in other countries.

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Essen KAPD (Josef Frey Archiv, Vienna, map 12). Documents kindly transmitted to me by the Austrian historian Hans Schafranek.

133 By contrast, Schwab, who left the KAPD in 1922 for personal reasons, refused to follow Schröder's KAI and remained in contact with the Berlin KAPD. He became a journalist and writer on economics; he also wrote articles on architectural questions. But after 1928, he participated – without formal engagement – in Berlin's swv (*Sozialwissenschaftliche Vereinigung*), which from 1924 taught young socialists, under the leadership of Paul Levi and Arthur Goldstein. The swv had been the real basis of the *Rote Kämpfer*. In 1930, he published a book on the new architecture: *Das Buch vom Bauen* (reprint: Bertelsmann, 1973). He was imprisoned in 1933 after Hitler's coming to power. In 1934, together with Franz Jung, he published a *Wirtschaftskorrespondenz* for the banks and economics-papers. From 1934 until the destruction of the RK by the Gestapo in 1936–7, he was the main leader of the group and the main editor of its illegal publications.

134 Emil Erdmann Sach (*Erdmann* or *Erd*) (1890–1959) survived Nazism, and remained a militant. As of 1952, he was publishing his own periodical in Leverkusen, *Stirn und Faust. Vervielfaeltigte Manuskripte Werktaetiger Menschen*, nos. 1 (May) and 2 (June) ['Brain and Fist. Duplicated manuscripts of working people']. See: IISG, Archief Cajo Brendel, map 136.

#### 4.4 *The Birth of a Berlin Current in the Dutch KAP*

Gorter's party was not spared by Germany's internecine struggles. The KAPN, which had rallied to the Essen tendency, was infected with the same splitting-virus, though to a lesser extent. The KAPN demonstrated great sectarianism towards the Berlin tendency. When the latter wanted to send delegates to its April 1922 Utrecht Congress, it refused to hear them. However, the KAPN did not follow Essen in its refusal to intervene in the proletariat's economic struggles; it was active in the class-struggle, and set up organisations for struggle, which took the name of 'Unions' (*Algemeene Arbeiders Bond*, or AAB) and were modelled after the German AAU. It was, above all, the KAPN's attachment to the KAI that provoked a reaction within the organisation: the exclusion of the Utrecht section in 1922, then of a large part of the Rotterdam section in 1923, was not sufficient to silence the pro-Berlin tendency, which was based on the youth-sections (KAJ) as well as a strong opposition in Amsterdam and other sections. The exclusions seriously weakened the KAPN numerically, but it was clan-rivalries that were to prove most disastrous. On one side was Luteraan, and on the other the *Korporatie* (corporation) of the Korper family, locked in struggle for control of the party. This struggle between cliques caused immense confusion: the Korper family left the KAPN in 1923, only to return shortly afterwards and take control of the organisation again. For his part, in 1927 Luteraan declared himself 'autonomous' and published his own journal *De Roode Vaan*.

Many militants, those who had even basic political seriousness, refused to take part in these clan-struggles and resolved to continue revolutionary work on a healthier basis. This was the case with Henk Canne Meijer, who left the KAPN in October 1924 out of disgust for 'an organisation which has become a political sporting club', or a family-sect divided between the followers of the Korpers and then those around Luteraan.<sup>135</sup> Around Canne Meijer, Piet

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135 Letter of resignation by Canne Meijer, of 26 October 1924, addressed to the KAPN (Canne Meijer Archives, map 25/5). Some names of active KAPN militants appear in the Collection Canne Meijer for the 1920s: Rosa Reens (1892–1928), H. Schouwink, Pieter Abraham Secrève (1887–1963), P.F. van Hoorn (1885–1937), C. Wijnveldt, Rosa Korper (1905–97?) and her husband Frits Kief, Bram Korper (1893–1940) along with his brother and sister Emmanuel ('Manus'; 1885–1940) and Sara Korper (1902–97?), Gerrit Jordens (1877–1957), A. Rot, D. van Swinderen (1890–1931?), P. van der Wal, D. Roodzant (1892–1957), Bernard Verduin (1900–1972), G.J. Christenhusz, Arie J. Bom (1895–?), W.J. Scheffer (1885–1924), F. Willems, Gerard J. Geers (1893–1965), Piet Coerman, Catho van der Meer-Maassen and her husband Barend Luteraan, Theo Maassen (1891–1974), brother-in-law of Luteraan, Manus Korper, Lo Lopes Cardoso, J. Wiertz (1891–1951), J.J. Janssen, J.N. Nugter (1897–1975), Jan Bos (1876–1948), A. Slagter, F. Agter-Nekkers. The KAPN had some territorial

Coerman and Jan Appel, were to form the Group of International Communists (GIC), the only group truly to embody the 'spirit' of the Dutch communist left. With the GIC, the Dutch communist left once again picked up the torch of international left-communism, which had been seriously shaken by the German split in 1922. The GIC represented the triumph of the Berlin KAPD current.

The mistake of Gorter and his supporters was to proclaim the KAI artificially, when there still remained within the Comintern left-fractions that could have been regrouped into an international left-communist current. This error weighed heavily on the German revolutionary movement. What was needed was not a new International, but a regroupment of left-communist fractions or new organisations, both in and outside the Comintern. Only such a regroupment could perhaps have made it possible to continue the struggle in the Comintern to the end. The decline of the world-revolution, which was evident in Europe by 1921, hardly allowed for the formation of a new International. Thinking that the course was still heading towards revolution, with the theory of 'capitalism's mortal crisis', there was a certain logic in Gorter and the Essen current's proclamation of the KAI. But their premises were wrong. Trotsky, who had in 1921 made fun of an eventual Fourth International, was to do the same thing in 1938, when he proclaimed his own Fourth International. This on the eve of the Second World-War, when the whole revolutionary movement had been swept away by the Stalinist and fascist counter-revolution, when it was 'midnight in the century'.<sup>136</sup>

Shortly before his death in 1927, Gorter had come much closer to the Berlin KAP. He devoted the last years of his life to unsuccessful efforts, in his own name, to regroup the divided forces of the communist left. His last political act was to warn the Berlin KAP against the euphoria which gripped the party after the integration of 2,000 militants from the *Entschiedene Linke*, who came from the KPD:

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sections – Enschede, Hengelo, Amsterdam, Weesp, Bussum, Twente, Zwolle, Leiden, The Hague, Rotterdam – and few militants: 200 members. The 'party' published *De Kommunistische Arbeider*, and *De Baanbreker* ('The Pioneer'), organ of the KAPN Youth, in 1922–5. This last paper (400 copies) was edited by Bernard Verduin (1900–1972). In May 1923, the *Korporatie* (family Korper and followers) left the 'party' to give birth in Amsterdam to an ephemeral *Kommunistisch Arbeiders Groep*, before 'reintegrating' the organisation, under pressure from the KAI. Some militants, sick of the sectarian and family-pathology, became militants of the GIC. Bram and Manus Korper committed suicide as the German troops marched into Amsterdam on 15 May 1940. (See biographies of the KAPN activists on the site Archives Anton Pannekoek: [www.aap.be](http://www.aap.be)).

136 Victor Serge.

While we welcome the growth of revolutionary forces, who have passed from the *Entschiedene Linke* to the KAP, we must keep our eyes open. The KAP is something great. It is great to the extent that it is able to keep itself pure from attempts to gain immediate success. It is the beacon of the class-struggle, pure and without compromise. Maintain this purity and you will save the revolution.<sup>137</sup>

This came down to declaring the Berlin tendency the only existing revolutionary focus: that it, more than the Essen tendency, had conserved the revolutionary heritage of the KAP. It was a clear message for new revolutionary generations: the revolutionary organisation is something difficult to preserve. Gorter repeated this 'message' until his death, as his position became ever more pessimistic.<sup>138</sup>

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137 *Kommunistischer Arbeiter*, organ of the KAPD Opposition, No. 1, 1927, 'An der Genossen der KAPD', a letter from the Dutch GIC of 16 October 1927. An opposition appeared within the KAPD against the too-rapid integration of the *Entschiedene Linke*, and in protest at Schwarz's refusal, agreed by the KAPD, to abandon his seat in Parliament. The opposition finally rejoined the party in April 1928.

138 Before his death, Gorter was strongly aware of the need to regroup council-communists. More lucid than the KAPD, he was yet more convinced of this necessity by his conviction that the revolutionary wave was finished, and that 'the time of reaction had come'. This is what he said to Jacques de Kadt, who had come to see him in the name of the BKSP (see note above). De Kadt 1965, p. 386.

Jacques de Kadt (1897–1988), writer, joined the CPH in 1920, and was the main founder of the BKSP (1924–7). He soon left the terrain of communism, in 1928 joining the SDAP, and becoming a leader of its left wing which was to give rise to the OSP in 1932. Founded in 1932 by himself, P.J. Schmidt and Salomon Tas (1905–76), the OSP was a typical expression of 'left-socialism'. He supported the mutiny of the battleship *Zeven Provinciën* in February 1933, and was thus imprisoned for three months. But he left the OSP in 1934, together with his friend Sal Tas, after the uprising of the working-class Jordaan district in Amsterdam, condemning all kind of 'barricade-romanticism'. Together with Sal Tas, in October 1934 he published a new anti-fascist and anti-pacifist periodical, *De Nieuwe Kern*. During the Second World-War, he escaped from the Netherlands to Indonesia, where he was interned – as were all Dutch citizens – in a Japanese camp. After 1946, De Kadt became a socialist deputy for the Dutch Labour Party (PvdA) from 1948 to 1963, and one of the apostles of the Cold War after 1947, in 'defence of the West' (with his book *Verdediging van het Westen*, Amsterdam, 1947). See Ronald Havenaar's note in *BWSA* 1992, pp. 141–5.



**PART 3**

*The GIC from 1927 to 1940*

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# The Group of International Communists: From Left-Communism to Council-Communism

## 1 The Origins of the GIC

The Group of International Communists (*Groep van Internationale Communisten*, GIC) was created in 1927. The name of the group was a programme in itself: as internationalists, the group was fighting for the world-revolution. The title 'group' meant that with the failure of the KAPD, which still called itself a party, it was no longer the time for artificially proclaimed parties. The period called for the defence, development and enrichment of revolutionary positions within small groups, often isolated from the working class as a whole.

At the outset, the GIC was numerically tiny. In 1927 it was made up of three militants who had come directly out of the KAPN.<sup>1</sup> In 1930 it was a nucleus of no more than ten people. It was only during the 1930s, when its audience grew, that the GIC became a stronger organisation: a maximum of fifty militants, which, in a country as small as the Netherlands, was by no means insignificant.

Initially established in Amsterdam, the group eventually spread to several towns, such as The Hague, Leiden, Groningen and Enschede.<sup>2</sup> However, the GIC, which refused to consider itself a centralised organisation, did not recognise local sections. It saw the nuclei established in different towns as groups in themselves. Finally, the GIC declared itself to be a federation of different groups. It is symptomatic that the name which appeared on its publications after 1928 was 'Groups of International Communists'. This federalist spirit was very much in the tradition of the anti-centralist AAU-E.

In fact, the Groups of International Communists represented a break with the party-spirit that had, to a greater or lesser degree, survived in the KAPN. The GIC did not follow in the tradition of the KAPD, but that of the German *Unionen* movement. It did not see itself as a Dutch group, but as an expression of the German Unionist movement; it was 'a part of the council-movement', 'a living part

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1 *Radencommunisme*, 'a review for the autonomous class-movement', produced by the *Groep van Radencommunisten Nederland*, No. 3, 1948. The group, composed of Canne Meijer, B.A. Sijes and others, had split from the *Spartacusbond* in 1947.

2 See Brendel 1974.

of the German *Union*-movement'.<sup>3</sup> While recognising the contribution of the KAPD, it rejected its conception of the party in the domain of propaganda. Its external political activity was limited to public meetings, whose themes were often far removed from questions of political intervention. Refusing to launch itself into polemics with the Social Democracy and the Third International, as the KAPD had done, it considered that its main task was to develop the anti-trade-union tendencies amongst the workers.

The GIC's propaganda remained very general and 'economistic': it restricted itself to discussing factory-organisations and the future 'communist economy'.<sup>4</sup> This form of activity was much closer to that of the AAU-E than that of the AAU which, since it was linked to the KAPD, developed a more political type of propaganda.

The GIC, which declared itself to be council-communist (*Rätekommunist*) rather than left-communist (*Linkskommunist*) – a noteworthy difference – assumed a councilist orientation in both theory and practice (see Chapter Seven).

## 2 The GIC Press

At first, in 1927, the internationalist communists limited themselves to distributing the press and pamphlets of German council-communism, organised in the *Unionen*. But they had actually made their first appearance as a group in 1926, by bringing out a KAPD pamphlet with their own preface. This pamphlet, which had created quite a fuss in Germany, revealed how Russia had been arming the *Reichswehr* since 1922.<sup>5</sup> It denounced the passage of the Russia of 1917 into the camp of the armed counter-revolution. It argued that 'the road taken by the Russia of the NEP, namely, the road of Leninism, led to the defence of capitalist fatherlands by proletarians, who have no fatherland, and thus to the Social Democracy's crime of 4 August 1914'.<sup>6</sup> The publication of this KAPD pamphlet

3 *PIC*, No. 6, 1928. In this issue, the GIC declared itself to be the pupil of Gorter and Pannekoek and situated itself on 'the same terrain as the KAPD and the AAU'. See also Canne Meijer's intervention at the unification-congress of the AAU and the AAU-E, in *KAU* 1932, pp. 27–8.

4 *KAU* 1932, pp. 27–8.

5 *Von der Revolution zur Konterrevolution: Russland bewaffnet die Reichswehr*; see KAPD 1927. To denounce the scandal of the close cooperation between the *Reichswehr* and the Red Army (the so-called *Granaten-Skandal*), the KAPD addressed an open letter to the central committee of the KPD. Not surprisingly, the KPD did not reply.

6 KAPD 1927, p. 14.

did not imply that there was a theoretical agreement with the latter, especially on the question of the party, but it did express a certain solidarity with the German revolutionary movement.<sup>7</sup>

It was only from 1928 onwards that the GIC published its own press: *Persmateriaal van de Groepen van Internationale Communisten* ('press-material of the GIC', or *PIC*) in Dutch and German. In addition to this theoretical review, there were numerous pamphlets, designed to be more propagandistic, more contemporary and more accessible to workers.<sup>8</sup> Later on, with the growth of unemployment, the GIC brought out an agitational sheet distributed amongst the unemployed in Amsterdam: *Proletenstemmen* ('Proletarian Voices'), from 1936 up until the war. The tone was very combative and the content very lively.

As part of the international council-communist movement, the GIC was always concerned with maintaining and even strengthening its international contacts. This was in marked contrast to the situation in the 1950s, when the Dutch councilist groups shut themselves off in the Netherlands, entering a state of isolation that even the events of 1968 hardly penetrated. Between 1927 and 1940, however, the GIC made a real effort towards clarification and regroupment at an international level. In this sense, up until 1933, the *PIC* was also published in German in order to contribute to the international debates within the council-communist movement. After 1933, when the German groups had to enter into total illegality and had great difficulty in bringing out their clandestine publications, the GIC published *Proletarier*,<sup>9</sup> which was to be the theoretical review of the KAU, then *Räte-Korrespondenz* between 1934 and 1937. Like Mattick's *International Council Correspondence* in the USA, this was a real organ for international discussion among the revolutionary milieu. The abandonment of *Räte-Korrespondenz* in 1937 was the sign that the GIC was beginning to withdraw into the Dutch-speaking sphere (which included Belgium). Its replacement by the Dutch theoretical review *Radcommunisme* expressed this withdrawal from international work.<sup>10</sup> The numerous pamph-

7 Unlike the GIC, the KAPD strongly emphasised the need for a party as the 'brain' and 'compass' of the revolution.

8 The GIC press was distributed free of charge, except for the theoretical review *Radcommunisme*, which had to be paid for between 1938 and 1940. A thousand copies of *Proletenstemmen* were given out free each week. In 1938, the overall monthly production of the 'councilist' press stood at 11,000 (letter from Canne Meijer to Mattick, 6 January 1938, Collection Canne Meijer 100A).

9 The periodical was 'officially' published in Amsterdam. It seems, in fact, that it was illegally published in Berlin.

10 There was a periodical called *Internationaler Beobachter*, produced between 1938 and 1939

lets brought out in Dutch, often in editions of several thousands (see Further Reading) could not make up for the absence of a theoretical review in German. In fact, the press of the GIC was not at all 'pure theory'. Certainly, it did accord great importance to the debates within the international council-communist movement (on factory-organisations, the economic crisis and theories of the crisis and the period of transition). It was also propagandistic, even though the GIC displayed such distrust towards the idea of the party: anti-parliamentarism, wildcat-strikes and the anti-union struggle, the denunciation of anti-fascist ideology, of Stalinism and social democracy, the struggle against war – these were political themes constantly raised in the *PIC*. The rejection of politics, understood as 'party-politics', was more a characteristic of the council-communism of the period after the Second World-War, of the 1950s and 1960s.

One of the most curious traits of the GIC press was the importance it gave to the Esperanto-movement. The members of the GIC devoted part of their time to learning Esperanto. The Esperanto-movement was certainly very strong in the 1920s and 1930s, particularly in the Netherlands, but it had an intellectual flavour, despite the hopes that some had in creating a 'proletarian Esperantism'. This illusion was widespread among the council-communists, who saw it as an essential vehicle for propagating their ideas internationally. This expressed itself in the enormous energy devoted to the translation of texts into Esperanto. There was the somewhat naive hope that, by propagandising in favour of Esperanto, the 'world-language',<sup>11</sup> it would be possible to encourage 'internationalist tendencies' within the proletariat. With this in mind, between 1936 and 1939 the GIC brought out a review in Esperanto: *Klasbatalo* ('Class-Struggle'), an organ of theory and discussion of the problems facing the new workers' movement. This effort soon fell through.<sup>12</sup>

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in Amsterdam, but this publication, supported by the GIC, was for information-purposes only, and is without theoretical interest.

- 11 Esperanto had been created at the end of the nineteenth century by the Polish linguist Zamenhof. In 1921, the Esperantist movement was set up in Prague, under the name of the World Union of the Nationless (SAT), which continues to exist today. It had lost its original neutrality: many members of the Third International belonged to it but left it in 1930. All that remained were anarchists, Trotskyists, social democrats, CPN sympathisers and council-communists. This interest in the Esperantist movement parallels the council-communists' interest in the freethinkers' movement (*Freidenker*), particularly in Germany.
- 12 200 copies of each edition of *Klasbatalo* (1936–9) – 'eldonatan de grupo de revoluciaj (proletaj) Esperantistoj'; 'published by the group of revolutionary (proletarian) Esper-

### 3 Intervention in the Class-Struggle and the GIC's Audience

It is a little-known fact that the class-struggle in the Netherlands in the 1920s and '30s remained at a high level. In 1920 there were 2.3 million strike-days, as opposed to 400,000 a year between 1901 and 1918.<sup>13</sup> In that year, the strikes had been particularly powerful in the ports and the transport-sector. In 1923–4 there was the big textile-strike in Twente. In 1929 it was the turn of the agricultural workers, who embarked on their biggest-ever strike. But with the great economic crisis, and up until the war, it was the unemployed who were at the centre of the social stage (almost twenty percent of the active population of the Netherlands were unemployed in 1936).<sup>14</sup> The action of the unemployed culminated in July 1934, with the uprising in the Jordaan district of Amsterdam (see Chapter Seven). However, as in many countries, the factory-proletariat remained passive at this time, intimidated by the threat of layoffs.

In these conditions, as with Mattick's group in the USA, the intervention of the council-communists was directed, above all, towards the unemployment-offices. They seem to have had a positive reception, since the GIC members were often denounced by the Dutch CP as 'Trotskyists' and 'fascists' in the same breath, above all in the 1930s.<sup>15</sup> Outside the unemployed-milieu, the activity of the GIC remained limited. Its small number of militants – but, above all, an atmosphere that was more and more unfavourable to the development of revolutionary ideas, the pressure coming from the threat of war, and the prevalence of anti-fascist ideology – all this condemned council-communism to a profound isolation. This isolation was parallel to the experience of the Italian communist left in France and Belgium.<sup>16</sup>

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artists' – were produced and were distributed, above all, in the international anarchist milieu. The attempt to produce a council-communist review in Esperanto was renewed by the *Spartacusbond* in the 1950s: see *PIC*, No. 6, March 1937, 'Esperanto in de klassen-strijd'.

13 See Cornelissen, Harmsen and de Jong 1965, pp. 41–74, on the class-struggle in the Netherlands in the 1920s.

14 See. AA. VV. 1961. In 1935 there were half a million unemployed, as opposed to 18,000 in 1929.

15 Thus in 1938 the CPN, led by Paul de Groot (1899–1986), Daan Goulooze (1901–65), and Ko Beuzemaker (1902–44), waged a violent campaign of slander against the GIC and *Proletenstemmen*, which was being given out free at the unemployment-offices in Amsterdam. The GIC were accused of being 'fascists'. See the CPN daily *Volksdagblad*, 25 April 1938, 'Sluipend fascisme'.

16 See Bourrinet 1980.

But the influence of Dutch council-communism was far from negligible in the political milieu to the left of the CP in the Dutch-speaking sphere. The GIC press was widely read in Sneevliet's RSAP, who saw the council-communists as the 'monks of Marxism'.<sup>17</sup> The same was true in the anarchist milieu, even though – as with the RSAP – the GIC was severely critical of anarchism, especially after the Spanish events. In 1933, the links were strong enough for a joint conference to be held between council-communist groups and various anarchist groups; but they did not last. Rejecting the anti-fascism and pacifism of the anarchist groups, the GIC broke off any connection with them in 1936–7. But it still remained a point of reference for many Dutch libertarians.

But the most astonishing thing was the real influence that the council-communist current had in the Dutch CP itself, resulting in the formation of an internal opposition. In December 1933, this took the name *Communistische Partij, Oppositie* (CPO). Composed of individuals excluded from the CP, or their sympathisers – and even of CP members! – from January 1934 it published a review called *De Vrije Tribune*. This group – led by the Hungarian Richard André Manuel,<sup>18</sup> a veteran of the 1919 Hungarian Revolution, J. Gans (1907–72) and later on F.J. Goedhart (1904–90) – called for the reform of the party. Like the Trotskyist current, it demanded the re-establishment of 'democratic centralism' in the party, through the election of party-officials and delegates to the congresses of the Comintern. To this end, it demanded an extraordinary congress and the reintegration of those expelled.<sup>19</sup> Politically, it proposed combating the 'opportunism' of the CPH and hoped for a 'united front' with the SDAP and the OSP, a left-split from the latter. At the outset, then, the CPO stood halfway between the CPH and left-socialism. But events moved very quickly. Within the CPO, two currents confronted each other, one led by Van Riel and Jacques Gans that was moving towards Trotskyism and Sneevliet's RSP, and the other led by Goedhart, supported by the section in The Hague, that was moving towards council-communism. The result was the departure of Van Riel and his fraction, which attached itself to the Trotskyist International Communist League and joined the RSAP, which had been newly formed on 31 March 1935 on the basis of the OSP and the RSP. The remaining majority of the CPO pronounced itself against parliamentarism, and for the struggle against the unions. The influence of the GIC was very clear, to the point where

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<sup>17</sup> Quoted by Brendel 1974.

<sup>18</sup> Pseudonym Van Riel.

<sup>19</sup> *De Vrije Tribune*, No. 1, January 1934.



it published articles from the *Persmateriaal*.<sup>20</sup> At its Easter 1935 congress, the CPO decided to dissolve itself in order to mark its complete break with the CPH and the left-socialist current. On 15 July 1935 *De Vrije Tribune* became the organ of the *Verbond van Communisten* ('League of Communists'). This new group had a totally council-communist orientation. Like the GIC, it defined the USSR as a form of state-capitalism, the latter being a general tendency of capitalism in crisis. Anti-parliamentary and anti-union, it came out in favour of a 'new workers' movement' and for the 'self-activity of the workers' on the basis of 'new class-organisations'. Like the GIC, it denounced anti-fascism just as much as fascism. It saw the CP and Sneevliet's RSAP as a kind of 'radical social democracy'. Soon afterwards, the *Verbond* broke up and most of its members joined the 'autonomous' council-communist groups or, like Goedhart, moved before 1939 towards a form of 'independent socialism'.

The influence of the GIC was also felt in Belgium, where in 1935 contacts had been made with Adhemar Hennaut's LCI.<sup>21</sup>

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20 For the history of the CPO, see Riethof 1970.

The 'councilist' programme of the opposition was published in *De Vrije Tribune* No. 1, 15 July 1935. The GIC mentioned the CPO, opposing the 'Leninist' line of the minority and supporting the 'councilist' majority: *PIC* No. 3, March 1935.

See also Maas 2002, the biography of Jacques Gans – communist, secretary of the Dutch association of proletarian writers *Links Richten*, Trotskyist, member of the RSP, writer and novelist, journalist in Paris, columnist for *De Telegraaf* – and the notice on Frans Goedhart in *BWSA* 2001. Goedhart was a journalist. During the Second World-War he was a main organiser of the illegal socialist newspaper *Het Parool*, 1941–5. He was one of the 23 suspects to be brought to trial before the German magistrate in the first *Parool* trial in December 1942. 17 death-sentences were pronounced and 13 *Het Parool* workers were executed by a firing-squad in February 1943. Goedhart managed to obtain a reprieve, and escaped from his *lager* in August 1943. After the war, he became a member of – and until 1970 also an MP for – the PvdA, which he eventually left. A partisan of the American camp during the Cold War, he was a member of the management-council of Radio Free Europe, but condemned American policies in South-East Asia in the 1960s.

21 Through Adhemar Hennaut (1899–1977), *Bilan* published texts by the Dutch council-communists. On only one occasion did the GIC inform its readers of the existence of the Italian Fraction, by publishing Mitchell's critique of the *Grundprinzipien*: see *PIC*, No. 1, January 1937, 'De Nederlandsche Internationale Communisten over het program der proletarische revolutie'.

#### 4 The Functioning of the GIC: The Working-Groups

The greatest weakness of the Dutch council-communists – which derived from their conception of the function of the revolutionary organisation (see Chapter Six) – was their mode of functioning. This mode of functioning no doubt explains their disappearance in 1940 and their inability to deal with clandestinity during the period of the Occupation.

Although it was really a political group the GIC refused to recognise itself as such. Its existence marked a break with the organisational tradition of the Dutch left. In this sense, the GIC was more an expression of the German 'anti-authoritarian' current, grouped around Rühle's AAU-E, than a continuation of the movement around Gorter, who embodied the partyist tradition. Because of its 'anti-authoritarianism', the GIC refused to function as a political organisation, and this was the case from its beginnings in 1927. Its meetings had no chair, there was no treasurer, no statutes, no obligatory dues, no voting, no difference between members and sympathisers. The mode of functioning was very close to that of the anarchist groups.

The Group of International Communists had no statutes, no obligatory dues, and its 'internal' meetings were open to all other comrades of other groups. As a result it never knew the exact number of members in the group. There was never any vote; this was judged unnecessary because you had to avoid any party-politics. You discussed a problem and when there was an important difference of opinion, the various points of view were noted, and that was it. A majority-decision had no significance. The working class would decide.<sup>22</sup>

This mode of functioning, which corresponded to that of a discussion-circle, was not without dangers. It condemned the GIC to withdraw into purely theoretical problems, and when political problems were posed, like the Spanish question (see Chapter Eight), it was very difficult to see the demarcations of principle between the majority and the minority of the group. At the same time, the divergences about intervention, which reflected the opposition between the activist and more theoretical tendencies, could not be overcome by voting or other means, and often led to rather unclear splits.

Marked hostility to any idea of centralising activity had been expressed from 1927 with the formation of 'working-groups'. These were organs of political

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<sup>22</sup> *Radencommunisme*, No. 3, cited by *ICO*, No. 101, Paris, 1971.

groups that did not dare admit to being such. There were thus 'working-groups' for international contacts, for the press, for the preparation of discussions, and for external intervention. In this way, the GIC was not only a federation of local groups, but also a federation of working-groups, each separate from the others. This might have made sense in a discussion-circle, but not in a political organisation. Nevertheless, this vision of working in small circles was not theorised at first: this only happened after 1935, and not without encountering severe internal criticism from within the council-communist movement (see Chapter Nine).

The result was that each local group wanted to function autonomously in relation to the GIC and in the same way, by setting up working-groups. In the 1930s in the Netherlands, there was thus a whole multitude of local groups who had their own press independent of the GIC, plus quite a few collections of individuals who refused to call themselves a group. This was the case, for example, with the 'councilist' group in The Hague. These groups defended the same political positions, with only minor disagreements (see Chapter Five).

Paradoxically, the GIC only recognised itself as a political fraction in the Esperantist movement, where it formed its own council-communist Esperantist fraction.<sup>23</sup> Thus, the GIC only found expression as a political organisation in apolitical educational groups.

## 5 The GIC's Militants

At first, the nucleus of the group was composed entirely of schoolteachers: Henk Canne Meijer, Theo Maassen (1891–1974) and Piet Coerman (1890–1962), a former friend of Gorter in Bussum. Other elements came later on: either students or workers. The contribution of these latter, most of them young and without much political tradition, was proof that the sources of revolutionary militancy had not dried up. The adherence of workers, which brought some 'proletarian blood' to the organisation, also proved that the GIC was far from being a mere coterie of intellectuals with an academic interest in Marxism.

However, like any small group, the GIC was very much marked by its most visible personalities, which gave certain coloration to the life of the group.

The soul of the group was really Henk Canne Meijer.<sup>24</sup> He was a former engineering-worker who had become a teacher, as much to gain the free time needed for political activity as from any pedagogic vocation. He was the liv-

23 PIC, No. 13, September 1937, 'Esperanto als propagandamiddel'.

24 Henk Canne Meijer (1890–1962) had been part of the NAS – in 1917 he directed *De jeugdige*

ing proof of the immense theoretical and political capacities existing within the proletarian movement, the living proof that political consciousness among the workers had not been brought from the outside by 'bourgeois intellectuals' as Lenin had argued in *What Is To be Done?* With a mind more theoretical than practical, gifted with clarity and simplicity, extremely upstanding, Canne Meijer had certain of the typical characteristics of the autodidact. An encyclopaedic spirit led him to engage in the study of biology and psychology. This kind of attitude, tinged with pedagogy, was particularly strong during certain periods of the workers' movement, especially among autodidacts. While such traits may not cause great problems in a small discussion-circle, the same is not true for a political organisation. Canne Meijer, but also a number of members of the GIC, had a strong propensity to see the organisation as a 'study-group' whose function was to educate its members and the working class. This propensity, typical of the council-communist groups, could have rapidly imprisoned the GIC in pure academicism. This was counterbalanced by the presence of other elements who were more active and wanted to intervene in the living class-struggle. But the GIC as a whole did not at all see itself as a mere circle of academic studies on Marxism, content to 'educate' the working-class elements who approached it.

The formation of the small nucleus around Canne Meijer in 1927 coincided with Pannekoek's return to political activity, or at least to a certain form of activity. Having remained silent for six years, he was shaken out of his political sleep by the crisis of the KAPD (see above). This silence contrasted strongly with Gorter's continual involvement in political activity until his death, and this despite serious illness.<sup>25</sup> Pannekoek could not really be considered a member of the GIC, since he participated only very episodically in the group's meetings. He was, above all, a regular and important collaborator both with *Persmateriaal* (PIC) and *Räte-Korrespondenz*, not to mention his numerous articles for Mat-

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*Werker*, organ of the NAS – and the SDP. At the time of the foundation of the KAPN, he was on the editorial committee of the paper *De Kommunistische Arbeider*. He represented the Berlin tendency within the KAPN. Between 1944 and 1947 he was a member of the *Spartacusbond*. In the 1950s he became 'a sceptic and withdrew from political activity' (according to an – inaccurate – article by Marc Chirik, the ICC's leader, in the ICC's *International Review*, No. 37, 1984, 'A lost socialist'). Nevertheless, in the 1950s, he was the mentor of Serge Bricianer, who introduced the political thought of Pannekoek to France.

- 25 This difference in attitude between Gorter and Pannekoek could also be observed in the Italian communist left. Whereas Bordiga withdrew from political activity between 1929 and 1944, Damen continued his work as a militant; it was he, and not Bordiga, who was the real founder of the Internationalist Communist Party (PCIInt), formed in 1943 in the north of Italy.

tick's *International Council Correspondence*. His contributions always stood out because of their great theoretical clarity and their focus on responding to questions posed by the class-struggle. The Pannekoek of the 1930s was not the same as the Pannekoek of the 1920s, who had recognised the necessity of the party. Believing that organised political activity was a remnant of a period he considered been-and-gone, he was content with serving as the 'mentor' of the GIC on the theoretical level, without intervening in its internal debates. Canne Meijer acted as an intermediary who kept him informed about the life of the group.<sup>26</sup> This attitude was absolutely new in the history of the revolutionary movement and expressed an implicit rejection of organised militant-activity. The 'place of honour' accorded to Pannekoek helped to maintain all the vagueness as regards who was a member of the group. The GIC thus appeared as a circle of friends, widened to include those outside the circle. This was not only the case with the Dutch group, since Mattick's group in the USA – in the late 1930s – had the same conception, with Korsch occupying a similar role to that of Pannekoek.<sup>27</sup>

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26 We find the same behaviour with Bordiga after 1945; he was not a formal member of the PCInt. Intervening from time to time in the meetings of the party, he had intermediaries like Bruno Maffi (1909–2003), charmingly referred to by the militants as 'ghost-writers', who explained the thoughts of the 'master'. But unlike Bordiga's texts, which could not be criticised under any circumstances, Pannekoek's were submitted to reflection and criticism within the GIC.

27 There is an extremely interesting and significant testimony by Henk Canne Meijer concerning Pannekoek's activities on the margins of the GIC:

'[Pannekoek] was always at our side with all his heart and he again participated in our work ... [Pannekoek] was a 'pure theoretician'; he was not a fighter, as we saw it. He only gave his analyses and conclusions; he never sought to follow them up. He never participated in the life of the organisation. He did not have the time for it. One of us reproached him for staying in such a comfortable position, for being a 'man of science' when our task was to bring science to man. He gave his analyses and we squabbled over them. He was an extremely modest man who did not display the least arrogance, and did not take position on questions if he was not absolutely sure of his judgement. We often said: Pannekoek says: "that may be, but it may well be quite different". In practice, we did not make any advances in this manner, since whatever happened we had to make decisions, but very often we were not very sure that they had been the right ones. This was the whole difference between the "pure theoretician" and the fighter' (Letter from Canne Meijer to Paul Mattick, around 1930; Collection Canne Meijer, 100 A, IISG Amsterdam; cited by B.A. Sijes in Pannekoek 1982, pp. 18–19).

Thus, in 1930, Pannekoek appeared to the members of the GIC as a 'good fellow-traveller' who refused any concrete militant-activity in the group. In the 1930s, Pannekoek's political activity seemed to be secondary to his scientific activity as an astronomer, which

Another element, very representative of the political life of the GIC, Jan Appel, had more activity as a militant in the group. Like Paul Mattick, Appel was one of those revolutionary workers who had left Germany in the mid-1920s for both professional and political reasons, and who continued their political activities in the German émigré-milieu.<sup>28</sup> But this activity soon went beyond

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he had been engaged in full-time since 1921. We should, however, note that Pannekoek's scientific visits abroad, like the one to the USA in 1936, were also used to make contact with the council-communist movement. Pannekoek probably met Paul Mattick in 1936. Indeed, from this date, the Dutch theoretician's English-language contributions in *International Council Correspondence* became more frequent. Pannekoek's contributions to the council-communist movement in the 1930s were huge in number and could easily fill several volumes. But they were entirely posed at the level of Marxist theory and never entered into practical organisational questions. It does not appear that Pannekoek took part in any of the GIC's meetings, except once or twice in an informal way. This separation between theory and practice was absolutely new in the revolutionary workers' movement. It cannot only be explained by the fact that Pannekoek had such heavy tasks in the scientific domain. It had its basis both in the GIC's fluid conception of organisation and in the absence of links with the proletariat in a period that was profoundly unfavourable for revolutionary activity.

- 28 Jan Appel (1890–1985; pseudonyms: Max Hempel, Jan Arndt, Jan Vos). Active in the SPD from 1908. He saw military service from 1911 to 1913, and thereafter served as a soldier in the war. In October 1917 he was demobilised and sent to work in Hamburg as a shipyard-worker. In October 1918 he called a strike of armaments-workers – ‘Our slogan was: “For Peace!”’. In November, he participated as a worker and a revolutionary delegate in the great naval-shipyard strikes in Hamburg. A *Linksradikal* in 1917, he became a member of the *Spartakusbund* in December 1918. In January 1919, after Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht had been murdered in Berlin, he made the acquaintance of Ernst Thälmann of the USPD, the future chairman of the Stalinist KPD. Soon he advocated the formation of factory-organisations (*Betriebsorganisationen*) – which led to the founding of the *Allgemeine Arbeiter Union Deutschlands*, or AAUD – and he was one of the main propagandists for the AAU. He was chairman of the *Revolutionäre Obleute*, and partially assumed the role of chairman of the Hamburg district of the KPD. He was with the Hamburg opposition, but he soon withdrew his support for them. For this reason, he was a delegate to the Heidelberg Congress of the KPD in October 1919. He was one of the main workers' leaders of the KAPD in April 1920. The same month, he was the second official delegate to represent the KAPD at the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI), then in session in Moscow – together with Franz Jung, Willy Klahre (1893–1970), sailor and Unionist leader in Cuxhaven, and Hermann Knüfken (1893–1976), he hijacked the fishing-boat *Senator Schröder* in order to reach Murmansk. After having spoken with Zinoviev in Leningrad, he travelled on to Moscow. With Jung and Hermann Knüfken, he was shortly received by Lenin himself. According to him:

‘Lenin, of course, opposed our and the KAPD's standpoint. During the course of a second reception, a little while later, he gave us his answer. This he did by reading to

the confines of this milieu. Like Paul Mattick, Jan Appel had been a member of the KAPD. He had been one of its founders, representing the party at the

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us extracts from his pamphlet *Left-Wing Communism – An Infantile Disorder*, selecting those passages which he considered relevant to our case. He held the manuscript of this document, which had not yet been printed, in his hand.'

One year later, Appel, together with four other comrades, spoke at the Third Congress of the Comintern of June–July 1921 under the pseudonym Hempel. According to his 1966 testimony:

'At the Third Congress of the Communist International in Moscow, we (KAPD) were afforded every freedom to express our point of view concerning the kind of policy which should guide our work. But we met with no agreement from the delegates from the other countries present. The main content of the decisions that were adopted at this congress held that we should continue to cooperate with the KPD in the old unions and in the democratic assemblies, and that we should drop our slogan "All Power to the Workers' Councils!"'

In 1920, he played an active part in the struggle of the Red Army of the Ruhr: he became one of the editors of the AAU organ *Klassenkampf* in Düsseldorf. At the end of 1921, he was against the formation of the KAI, and stayed in the Berlin KAPD. He was arrested in November 1923 'for armed aggression' (expropriation) and was condemned to two years in prison for having diverted the fishing-boat *Senator Schröder* and piracy, an affair which lasted three years. This allowed him to read Marx's *Capital* in depth and to write the *Grundprinzipien*. When he left prison (in Düsseldorf), in December 1925, he began moving away from the KAPD, but not the AAU. In April 1926 he moved to the Netherlands and worked in the naval shipyards in Zaandam (north of Amsterdam). He joined the GIC. In 1933, the Hitler government demanded his extradition, so he went into clandestinity under the name Jan Vos. During the war, and up until 1948, he was in the *Spartacusbond*. After an accident that obliged him to emerge from clandestinity in 1948, the authorities discovered that he was a 'German foreigner'. But:

'... a testament from over twenty bourgeois citizens, good and true, was required in order to protect me from being simply pushed over the border! That I had been active in the resistance [*verzet*, or 'opposition', in Dutch] movement decided the issue in my favour. Jan Appel made his appearance once again, but it was necessary for him to refrain for a while from all political activity'.

In fact, the Dutch authorities made him promise to abstain from political activity. This in no way prevented him from remaining unimpeachably loyal to his revolutionary convictions. In 1975, in Paris, he took part in the founding congress of the International Communist Current, of which he remained a distant sympathiser until his death on 4 May 1985 in Maastricht.

He was married to Lea Berreklaauw (1914–97), the Dutch novelist, poet, author of radio-programmes and musical spectacles for children. In 1982, Lea Appel-Berreklaauw published a novel on the history and destruction by the Nazis of a Dutch-Jewish orphanage for girls in Amsterdam: *Het brood der doden. Geschiedenis en ondergang van een joods meisjes-weeshuis*. See Halkes 1986 and van den Berg 2001.

Third Congress of the Comintern. But he was more a man of the Unions, of the AAU – he was editor of *Klassenkampf* in Düsseldorf, the AAU organ for Westphalia – than of the KAPD, even though he had a leading position within the latter. His imprisonment between 1923 and 1925 took him away from the political life of the KAPD. It did enable him, however, to reflect on the Russian experience. This reflection was to give birth to the *Fundamental Principles of Communist Production and Distribution* (the *Grundprinzipien*), which was partly written in prison. This book became the ‘bible’ as much of the German *Unionen* movement as of the GIC, and revealed a fixation on the economic, rather than the political, problems of the revolution. To that extent, Appel embodied the conceptions of the AAU very well. But he embodied even more the militant revolutionary spirit of the German proletariat, bringing with him the whole experience of a great revolutionary movement, something that the Dutch council-communists did not have in any concrete sense. Apart from his abilities as an editor – Appel was a member of the editorial committee – and his organising skills, he brought, above all, the dynamism of a proletarian militant who had been educated in the revolutionary struggle, something that was often lacking in the militants of the GIC. Although suffering from many material difficulties in the Netherlands (he was an illegal immigrant), especially after Hitler came to power, he played a central role in the GIC, above all at the level of international work regarding Germany and Denmark.

We could refer to a number of other militants who gave their lifeblood to the GIC, some well-known, others not.<sup>29</sup> But this would run the risk of seeing the GIC as a sum of personalities or individuals. Unlike many ‘councilist’ groups, the GIC refused to present itself in this manner. The articles in *PIC* were anonymous, and the signature of Pannekoek never appeared. Like the Italian communist left regrouped around the review *Bilan*, the GIC wanted to appear

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29 Cajo Brendel (1915–2007) was a member of the GIC for one year, from 1934 to 1935; he left to form an autonomous council-communist group in The Hague. Previously, he had briefly been a Trotskyist. B.A. Sijes, a voluntarily-proletarianised Jewish student, was a member of the GIC from 1933, after having left the Social Democracy. Others, such as the brothers Piet and Bruun van Albada, were members of the GIC from the beginning of the 1930s and continued their political activity in the *Spartacusbond*. Very much representative of a combative proletariat, the worker Age van Agen (1896–1973) published the *Proletenstemmen* review, written to be distributed free to the unemployed. Other members of the GIC are worth mentioning: Herman de Beer (1871–1936), J.L. Hobijn, Leo Hagen, Mien Dekker, B. Bianchetti (1906–1980). (Sources: letters from Cajo Brendel to Philippe Bourrinet, 2 January and 23 February 1981; <http://www.aaap.be/Pages/Group-GIC.html>).



as an anonymous expression of the proletariat. But while the group tried to keep its militants anonymous, this did not necessarily mean that it appeared as a collective body. Except for leaflets, texts were never signed in the name of the GIC, and it was difficult to know whether this-or-that article represented a particular opinion or the view of the group as a whole. The principle of anonymity did not do away with the fragmented conception of the organisation as a sum of working-groups and of individuals.

Although reduced to a small nucleus, the history of the GIC goes well beyond the confines of the Netherlands, in the same way that the impact of Mattick's group and review *Council Correspondence* was not limited to the USA. Especially after 1933, and up to the Second World-War, the GIC constituted one of the rare revolutionary poles to the left of the Trotskyist current. Together with Mattick's group and *Bilan*, it was one of the few groups to reject any participation in the war behind the banner of 'democracy' or anti-fascism. It was one of those rare groups that held on to the left-communist positions that had been defended in the 1920s. Finally, it was one of the few groups to maintain a living Marxist thought, despite its isolation and the unfavourable nature of the period. More than this, it was able to enrich the framework of Marxist theory on certain points, in particular the question of state-capitalism.

Despite its numerical weakness, but also despite weaknesses that derived from a 'councilist' conception of revolutionary activity and practice (see Chapter Seven), the GIC was an international current of great importance, which found expression in a number of countries. As such, it constitutes an important link in the international left-communist current between the 1920s and the council-communist tendency today.

## The Birth of the GIC (1927–33)

The period from 1927 to Hitler's coming to power is a key one in the history of the Dutch communist left. In Germany, what remained of the Essen current had literally disintegrated: the KAI was only a shadow of its former self, to the point where its executive moved to the Netherlands in 1927.<sup>1</sup> But the KAPN – which was, in practice, the only real section of the KAI – died slowly. In the Netherlands, the Essen tendency, which no longer even had Gorter's backing, was effectively moribund.

This period was unfavourable to the development of left-communism amongst the working class. After the defeat of the miners' strike in Great Britain in 1926, then the defeat of the Chinese proletariat in 1927, the postwar revolutionary wave was broken. The Comintern's approach had been a conscious policy of defeat that destroyed the workers' revolutionary aspirations in every country. The formation of the Anglo-Russian Committee<sup>2</sup> at the time of the English miners' strike, and the Comintern's alliance with Chang Kai-Chek's *Kuomintang* were so many milestones in the defeat of the world-proletariat, leading directly to Hitler's triumph in 1933. The ultimate adoption of 'Socialism in one country' by the Comintern in 1927 signed its death-sentence.<sup>3</sup> Stalinism triumphed, along with its policy of defence of the USSR. The Stalinist policy in Germany proved to be the fatal blow for the international proletariat. With the crushing of the German proletariat by Nazism, abetted by the policy of the Comintern and the KPD, the path to revolution was barred for decades. The counter-revolution triumphed worldwide and the way was cleared for the

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1 The Dutchman Lo Lopes Cardoso (1892–1944), a member of the KAPN, became secretary of the KAI, which held a conference in Amsterdam (20–26 February 1927). At the beginning of the 1930s, the KAI was no more than an office in Amsterdam, managed by the publisher Emanuel Querido (1871–1943), whose publishing-house had brought out Gorter's poetry. Emanuel's brother, Israël (1872–1932) was a famous novelist and critic, who wrote a novel, influenced by Zola's naturalism, about the Amsterdam Jordaan workers' district, *De Jordaan* (1924).

2 On Stalin's initiative, an alliance was created between the Russian unions and the British trades-unions.

3 Stalin defended this theory in his 1926 book *Foundations of Leninism*: 'socialism in one country' was 'the construction of a fully socialist society in our country, with the sympathy and support of the proletariat in other countries, but without the prior victory of the proletariat in other countries'.

Second World-War. However, this period, with the brutal explosion of crisis in 1929, was also a striking confirmation of the theory of the ‘mortal crisis of capitalism’ defended by the Dutch-German communist current. The ‘objective conditions’ for proletarian revolution were realised: the crisis that had been so greatly expected and predicted now arrived. But the ‘subjective conditions’ for the revolution were missing. The groups in the tradition of Dutch-German left-communism remained unaware of this contradiction between the ‘subjective’ and ‘objective’ conditions of the revolution.

## 1 The Break with the KAPD

For reasons that were as much political as circumstantial, from 1927 the GIC separated from the KAPD, eventually to split from it.

### 1.1 *The Evolution of the KAPD after 1923*

The revolutionary political milieu to the left of the KPD was still far from negligible in 1923. It numbered some 20,000 members, organised both in the *Unionen* and in the KAPD and its various splits.<sup>4</sup> The KAPD, which had about 2,000 members, remained stable. In 1923, it was one of the few revolutionary groups to oppose the nationalist, even anti-Semitic policy of the KPD.<sup>5</sup> It strongly opposed the policy of ‘workers’ governments’, which it characterised as anti-worker governments.<sup>6</sup> It moreover condemned the KPD’s formation of

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4 See Kool 1970, p. 145.

5 See, for example, Paul Frölich: ‘Those who share the national interest must ally themselves with the fighting proletariat, must want the revolution ... We do not deny the necessity of national defence, when it is on the agenda ...’ (*Rote Fahne*, ‘Nationale Frage und Revolution’, 3 August 1923). Or Ruth Fischer, addressing Nazi students: ‘Those who call for a struggle against Jewish capital are already, gentlemen, class-strugglers, even if they do not know it. You are against Jewish capital and want to fight the speculators. Very good. Throw down the Jewish capitalists, hang them from the lamp-post, stamp on them’ (from a meeting of 25 July 1923, reported in *Die Aktion* No. 14, 1923). The KAPD presented a compilation of this kind of nationalist prose in its pamphlet *Die KPD im eigenem Spiegel. Aus der Geschichte der KPD und der 3. Internationale*: see KAPD 1926, pp. 59–79.

6 See KAZ No. 75, September 1923, ‘Zur Frage der Arbeiter und Bauernregierung’: ‘We are not a legal party and we have never yet accorded any value to legality. If necessary, we would fight the “workers’ government” from conspiratorial hiding-places, like the Bolsheviks fought Tsarism’. Finally, the KAPD, in KAZ, No. 71, September 1923 (‘Neues Blutbad der sächsischen Arbeiter und Bauernregierung’) recalled that the ‘workers’ government’ in Saxony had fired on a demonstration of the unemployed, leaving three dead and thirty wounded.

'Proletarian Centuries' (*Proletarische Hundertschaften*) as a putchist enterprise, given the absence of workers' councils.<sup>7</sup>

After 1923, during the period of the 'relative stabilisation of capitalism' that lasted from 1924 to 1928, the KAPD continued its propaganda. It was convinced that even though a first revolutionary wave had failed in Germany, under the blows of the inevitable global economic crisis a second one would once more sweep over the country. This was somewhat simplistic. *Proletarier*, the KAPD's theoretical organ, wrote in January 1926: 'If 1924 was the year of stabilisation and 1925 the year of crisis, 1926 will be the year of struggles'.<sup>8</sup>

In fact, 1926 was a year of intense KAPD activity directed at the left of the KPD, which rejected Bolshevisation. The KAPD by no means considered the KPD to be a 'bourgeois party', but rather as a 'centrist party' from which revolutionary militants could emerge, thanks to the crisis in the Comintern's national sections.<sup>9</sup> As the KAPD noted, it was not a question of forming an opposition within the KPD, but rather of beginning to draw up a political assessment in order to start down the revolutionary road:

Like Cervantes's Don Quixote, [the opposition] fights the effects, where it is a matter of revealing those causes which are of fundamental significance for the structure and field of activity of the revolutionary workers' movement ... Instead of throwing down the gauntlet to the head of the party, with a positive critique, this left fights for the legalisation of its opposition ... The left in the KPD must soon decide if it wants to run behind the wagon of history by moaning and making a fuss or if it wants to oppose the united front of capitalism from Moscow to Washington with the struggle of the revolutionary proletariat.<sup>10</sup>

Opposed to a regroupment of 'malcontents' without principles, the KAPD waited for the KPD opposition to be excluded, to begin the work of clarification.

7 Members of the KAPD who participated in the KPD's 'Proletarian Centuries' (*Proletarische Hundertschaften*) were expelled.

8 *Proletarier*, Heft 1, January 1926, 'Dem Jahrgang 1926 zum Geleit'. According to a police-report, the *Proletarier* had a print-run of 7,000 copies. See Ritter 1979, R134/23, 16 April 1924.

9 See, for example, the article by Carl Happ, under the pseudonym of Carl Schlicht, in *Proletarier*, No. 8, August 1927: 'Der Zentrismus in der KPD'. Stalinism in Russia was also described as 'centrist': 'the struggle against Moscow is firstly the struggle against this centrism: unmasking it is the principal task of proletarian class-politics'.

10 'Die Zukunft der Linken in der KPD', by Carl Schlicht (Carl Happ) in *Proletarier*, No. 2/3, April 1926.

From May 1926 onwards, a multitude of groups, often politically heterogeneous, that had been constituted as fractions with the KPD, had indeed been excluded:

- Ernst Schwarz and Karl Korsch's *Entschiedene Linke* ('Resolute Left') group, with about 7,000 members;
- the Ivan Katz group, which, together with the Franz Pfemfert group, formed an organisation of 6,000 members, close to the AAU-E, under the name of the cartel of communist organisations of the left, and which published the journal *Spartakus*. The latter became the organ of the *Spartakusbund no. 2*;
- the Ruth Fischer–Arkadij Maslow group, which comprised 6,000 militants;
- the Hugo Urbahns (1890–1947) group, which had 5,000 members: the future *Leninbund*;<sup>11</sup>
- the Wedding opposition, excluded in 1927–8: along with part of the *Leninbund* created by Urbahns, it was later to form the German Trotskyist opposition.

Joint work between the *Entschiedene Linke* and the KAPD only developed with the Schwarz group (Schwarz was still a Member of Parliament) once the latter had split with Korsch (who went on to publish *Kommunistische Politik*).

For the KAPD, there was no question of working with Korsch, who defended syndicalist and parliamentary politics. For the KAPD, the slogan of a 'new Zimmerwald' advanced by Korsch was only a 'phrase without content'.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, since *Kommunistische Politik* approved the Comintern's policy from 1921 to 1925, it could hardly subject it to rigorous criticism:

Those who consider the tactic of the Third International correct from 1921 to 1925 cannot consider that of 1926 as false because the tactic of the Third International in 1926 is only the logical continuation of its [political] line ... The Third International is built on a marshy terrain, that of reformism, in an epoch when capitalism goes from catastrophe to catastrophe and when the revolution is on the agenda: it has built its house on sand.<sup>13</sup>

There was a different problem with Ivan Katz's group, which had joined together with the AAU-E and a small independent trade-union in a heterogeneous cartel.<sup>14</sup> The principal question was the acceptance of a centralised revolu-

<sup>11</sup> See the well-documented study on the left in the KPD, Langels 1984.

<sup>12</sup> KAZ, No. 77, 1926, 'Zimmerwald: eine Phrase ohne Inhalt'.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> In June 1926, the *Spartakusbund Linkskommunistischer Organisationen* was formed. Pfem-

tionary organisation. Considering that the Katz group was a 'peculiar kind of anarchism', the KAPD refused any joint work with it, insofar as the party-question had not been resolved:

The struggle for revolutionary tactics is not a struggle against the revolutionary party, but, on the contrary, a struggle for the revolutionary party, as leader of the class ... For you, the question is: for or against the KAPD.<sup>15</sup>

In the end, only Schwarz *Entschiedene Linke* replied, but with hesitations on the KAPD. They undertook an intense campaign of joint denunciation of the 'scandal of the grenades' delivered by the Russian government to the *Reichswehr*; the KAPD used Schwarz's speeches in Parliament to denounce both the friendship-treaty between Germany and the USSR, and Russian imperialism.<sup>16</sup>

From October to November 1926, a tighter collaboration between the two organisations developed. *Entschiedene Linke* (EL), the Schwarz group's organ, was even printed in the KAPD's printshop. In December 1926, EL recognised that it stood on the same ground as the KAPD on all major questions (trade-unionism, parliamentarism, state-capitalism in Russia, recognition of the necessity of a party) Finally, at a session of EL's central committee – from 4–6 June 1927 – there was a unanimous decision to merge with the KAPD before the autumn. At the same time, EL militants had to leave any kind of trade-union and join the AAU. But the bacillus of 'anti-parliamentary parliamentarism' was still present within the EL. A substantial exception was made excusing it from abandoning its remaining parliamentary seats: Schwarz remained an MP in the Reichstag. Officially, his parliamentary stipend financed the propaganda of the EL. This showed an inconsistent attitude, given that all electoral participation had been definitively rejected, and it led to lively protests within the EL: a minority of the leadership, supported by the majority of the local group in Berlin, demanded the immediate abandonment of the seat still held by Schwarz.<sup>17</sup> It was in this rather unfavourable context that the fusion between EL and the KAPD finally took place in July 1927. After suspending the review EL, about 2,000

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fert was its mentor. It was joined by an independent transport-union (*Industrie-Verband für das Verkehrsgewerbe*).

15 KAZ, No. 69, August 1926, 'Der Weg der KPD-Opposition'.

16 See KAPD 1927. In 1923, at the same time as the Russian state proclaimed its solidarity with the insurgent workers of Hamburg, Russian boats brought shells, grenade-launchers and machine-guns which went to the *Reichswehr* to crush the insurrection. See Castellan 1954.

17 See Langels 1984, pp. 122–6.

to 3,000 militants joined the KAPD, which had fewer members. The merger provoked a serious internal crisis.

Indeed, in the 'Schwarz affair' the KAPD showed a certain ambiguity. It claimed that Schwarz's giving up his parliamentary seat was not a 'question of principle', but a matter of convenience, to the extent that the party could use his parliamentary pay: 'The party can, without contradicting its anti-parliamentary attitude, pose and resolve the question of the mandate from the point of view of the given opportunity. In this situation, it must consider whether a demonstrative abandonment would be more useful for the movement than a financial use of the mandate.'<sup>18</sup>

However, the KAPD was clear that Schwarz 'could not become a member of the party as long as he did not give up his seat'.<sup>19</sup> Consequently, the KAPD considered Schwarz as an active sympathiser who privately supported the party financially through his contributions.

This insistence on possible 'opportunities' looked like a concession to opportunism. All the more so since the political adversaries of the KAPD claimed that the party had abandoned its anti-parliamentary positions. Hence, from July 1927, a strong opposition developed within the KAPD denouncing the policy

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18 *Zur Information* (November 1927), 'Eine Frage, die keine sein dürfte'. *Zur Information* was an internal bulletin published by the GHA of the KAPD, started in 1924.

19 Hermann Remmele (1880–1939), in the KPD leadership, eventually killed by Stalin in Russia, declared ironically in 1927 that it would not be long before the KAPD took part in the elections. It was not the case with the KAPD and with Schwarz.

Ernst Schwarz (1886–1958) was a doctor of philosophy and teacher. He joined the USPD in 1920, then the KPD. He was an MP from 1924 to 1928, and left the party with Korsch in 1926, joining the KAPD in 1927. In April 1928, 'under pressure', he left the KAPD, and he seems to have briefly been a member of the *Paneuropa* movement of Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi (1894–1972). He left Germany for the USA in 1933, returning in around 1946, without any further known public political activity.

Ivan Katz (1889–1956) was a member of the SPD from 1906. He left the Social Democracy in 1919 to join the USPD, then the KPD in 1920, leading the communal section of the party. Like Schwarz he was an MP from 1924 to 1928. One of the KPD left's leaders in 1925, he was expelled from the party in 1926. He joined the *Spartakusbund No. 2* set up by Pfemfert, for a period of two years. He then worked for the National Assistance Board of Berlin-Wedding. Arrested by the Nazis in March 1933, as a 'communist' and a 'Jew', he was then released. Arrested on three further occasions, he was sent to the concentration camp Mau-thausen in 1944. Once freed, he worked for an American intelligence-agency (Counter-Intelligence Corps), and also joined the SED in Berlin. He contributed, along with Weiland and others, to the Berlin rebirth of the swv, which brought together discussion-circles 'for all free socialists'. He was one of the founders of the ephemeral German 'Titoist' party (UAP) in 1951. He retired in 1954, to live in Tessin (Switzerland), where he died.

of 'little advantages' which hid behind the party-leadership's 'neutrality' in the 'Schwarz affair'. It resulted – even though the KAPD had by no means abandoned the anti-parliamentary terrain – in a split within the party itself. The opposition did not attempt to remain in the party so as to conduct its political battle. Its attitude was irresponsible, equivalent to scuttling the KAPD: it launched an appeal for a 'dues-strike' and prevented the distribution of the *KAZ*.<sup>20</sup> Finally the opposition in Berlin – which brought together almost half the district – seceded, albeit without the support of the Weissenfels, Leipzig, Hamburg and Rhineland sections, who wanted to fight within the KAPD.

It published its own organ, *Kommunistischer Arbeiter*, and brought with it part of the AAU, which published *Klassenfront*. This situation lasted from 1927 to April 1928. A long discussion was necessary to convince the opposition (led by Ernst Lincke) to rejoin the KAPD, that the split was not justified by a question of principle, and that the party had not abandoned anti-parliamentarism.

The situation was very serious. The majority of the former members of the EL had not been properly integrated in the KAPD. Many of them left quickly or devoted themselves to fractional activities with the opposition. Instead of strengthening the party, the entry of 2,000 members from the EL had ultimately weakened it. Their adhesion, not as individuals, but by fusion of the EL's local sections with those of the KAPD, had been too fast.<sup>21</sup> The bacillus of the split, identified long before in 1921, had finally struck the party. It did, however, have a strong audience among the KPD opposition from 1925 onwards.

The KAPD had, indeed, resolved the 'Schwarz affair': the latter moved away from the KAPD and political life; he gave up his seat, which was due for re-election. He was to confess that, intoxicated by his new audience, he had dulled the edge of his critique and had fallen into opportunism. But above all, the attitude of the opposition revealed not only a lack of Marxist education on the part of elements coming into the party, guided by 'feeling and enthusiasm', but also the remnants of 'anti-authoritarian' ideology, dangerous for the KAPD's own existence: 'the splits and formation of different tendencies and their decomposition are sufficient proof that our party too was, in its great majority, composed

20 *Zur Information* (November 1927), 'Eine Frage, die keine sein dürfte'. The 'dues-strikers' were excluded by the KAPD for as long as they refused to go back on their decision.

21 The KAPD's Seventh Congress in April 1928 noted, with some lucidity, that: 'For the first time the party sought to attract workers with parliamentary traditions ... The experience has shown, however, that this attempt brought the party within a hair's breadth of organisational collapse and political confusion. The congress declares: the integration of factions and a numerical reinforcement of the party along these lines has no future.' Cited in *KAZ* (Berlin), No. 28, 12 April 1928.



of members who allowed themselves to be guided not by clear knowledge, but by feeling and enthusiasm ... The primitiveness and lack of Marxist understanding among these elements always leads to an anti-leader “anti-authoritarian” spirit, which, in the last instance, leads, and can only lead, to the negation of the organisation ...’<sup>22</sup>

### 1.2 *The GIC, Pannekoek and the KAPD*

The crisis of the KAPD was deep indeed, revealing powerful anti-organisational tendencies in the left-communist movement. It was the starting-point of a crisis in the relationship between the AAU and the KAPD. On one side, there were the defenders of a ‘flexible policy’ (*beweglich*), who wanted to transform the *Unionen* into organisations for economic struggles and rejected ‘party-politics’ in favour of ‘class-politics’. On the other side, the KAPD wanted to maintain, and even develop, its activity as a political organisation, while maintaining its ‘leadership’ of the AAU. This ‘rigid’ (*starr*) policy opposed all ‘flexible’ tactics that would lead the KAPD to deviate from its principles and minimise the importance of political organisation.

The crisis of the KAPD had revealed the GIC’s evolution towards more clearly council-communist positions. This did not happen without wavering and contradictions within the GIC itself.

The GIC intervened in the crisis of the KAPD from the outset. It sided resolutely with the opposition. Canne Meijer, who represented the group at the session of the KAPD central committee held over 29–30 October 1927, rightly warned against ‘the danger of a complete destruction of the KAPD’ by opportunism.<sup>23</sup> This had penetrated even into ‘the centre of the party’. According to the GIC, there was now a real possibility that the KAP would take part in the elections. The prestige of the KAPD was at stake and could not be weighed against the monthly 600 marks of Schwarz’s stipend.

While considering the opposition’s refusal to pay dues to be justified ‘up to a point’, the Dutch called for the unification of the party and warned the opposition not to commit ‘the big mistake of tearing the party to shreds.’<sup>24</sup> But significantly, the Dutch group saw in the internal crisis the results of ‘leader-politics’ as practised by the KAPD leadership.

<sup>22</sup> *Zur Information*, November 1927, ‘Einige Lehren’.

<sup>23</sup> *Der Kommunistischer Arbeiter*, No. 1, November 1927, ‘Stimmen zum Parteistreit’. The organ of the opposition asserted falsely that the KAPN was present at the session of the KAPD central committee from 29–30 October. It was, in fact, the GIC, represented by Canne Meijer, as a certain *Lagebericht* of the German police attested in November 1927.

<sup>24</sup> *Der Kommunistischer Arbeiter*, No. 1, November 1927.

This critique of 'leader-politics' quickly led the GIC to call into question the political function of the party as defended by the KAPD. In a letter to the KAPD written in February 1928, Canne Meijer reproached the KAPD with passing from 'class-politics' to 'party-politics'.<sup>25</sup> He not only criticised the opportunism of the politics of 'little advantages', but also the fact that the party 'concentrated nearly all its activity on disputes with the KPD and its various offshoots'. The political struggle ultimately led to a division of the party: those who 'know' and those who 'carry things out', 'lower down' the political line. Moreover, 'the centre of gravity of the activity of the party [should be] in the factories', but also in the AAU and the 'construction of factory-organisations'. As the KAPD's response to this letter noted, this was to misjudge reality, where party-struggles were 'inevitable and necessary', and its conclusions would mean doing without the 'weapons of criticism' in 'push[ing] back the obstacles to the development of revolutionary ideology'.<sup>26</sup> Above all, it would mean encouraging the political indifference of the workers, by withdrawing from the terrain of political struggle. Finally, to call for the creation of factory-organisations of struggle was merely a 'war-cry': such organisations could only be born from the struggle itself and 'created by the workers'. The KAPD forcefully rejected any such 'anti-political' vision, whether expressed by the GIC or by any part of the Unionist movement. It was the function of the revolutionary party that was at stake.

In a text published in *Proletarier* in the same period, under the pseudonym of Karl Horner, Pannekoek posed the questions more clearly.<sup>27</sup> His vision was far removed from any 'anti-leader' ideology, and thus somewhat different from the GIC's. It was a question of situating the KAPD's activity within the current historic course.

In 'Principles and Tactics', Pannekoek showed that the world-revolutionary wave had finished in Europe. The defeat was due, in the first place, to the proletariat's immaturity:

Every chapter of Europe's history from 1918 to today could be entitled 'The defeat of the revolution' ... The proletariat showed that it was hardly at the level of its historic mission, while the bourgeoisie knew how to exploit its deficiencies to the full. The power of the bourgeoisie is due essentially to the lack of maturity, to the fears, to the illusions of the proletariat, to the

25 KAZ (Berlin), Nos. 17 and 18, March 1928, 'Vermeintlicher oder tatsächlicher Opportunismus?.'

26 KAZ (Berlin), No. 13, March 1928, 'Eine Erwiderung'.

27 Horner, 'Prinzip und Taktik', *Proletarier*, Nos. 7 and 8, July and August 1927.

absence within its ranks of class-consciousness, a clear vision of its goals, or of unity and cohesion.<sup>28</sup>

Unlike the KAPD and the AAU, Pannekoek – and equally, the GIC before 1929 – saw the new period as one of economic and political stabilisation, and denied any possibility of a ‘mortal crisis of capitalism’. Two years before the crisis of 1929, he refused to envisage a crisis of overproduction. According to him, capitalism still had substantial possibilities for expansion: ‘It is absolutely not impossible for capitalism to enlarge production and thus to overcome an extremely unfavourable conjuncture’.<sup>29</sup> On the contrary, the economic recovery was possible – as in the nineteenth century – thanks to the discovery of new outlets. Asia offered a new field of accumulation for capital, thanks to its promotion to the rank of an ‘autonomous element of capitalist production’ on the world-level. This meant that ‘capitalism is far from being at its last gasp’. Pannekoek postponed the crisis and the revolution to a distant future:

We are only at the foot of the mountain. It is difficult today to foresee economic developments in the short term. If a phase of expansion is coming, it is equally certain that it will be followed by a crisis of comparable proportions. And with the crisis, the revolution will reappear. The old revolution is over; we must prepare the new one.<sup>30</sup>

It followed that the function of the KAPD and the AAU should be modified. Unlike the GIC Pannekoek did not yet reject the political function of the revolutionary party: he increasingly did so, under the influence of the GIC, in the late 1930s (see below). In 1927, Pannekoek was still faithful to the positions he expressed in 1920 in *World Revolution and Communist Tactics*. He recalled the classical position of the left-communists: ‘it is not the party that makes the revolution, but the class as a whole’.<sup>31</sup> He recalled that the revolutionary party, necessary as a vanguard, cannot substitute itself for, nor dissolve itself into, the working class. He insisted on the indispensable role of this party, before and during the revolution, essentially on the political terrain: ‘All action demands a permanent spiritual struggle by the masses in order to achieve lucidity, a struggle waged in the form of a combat between opposing parties and tendencies, and the party must pursue this struggle for the workers and under their

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<sup>28</sup> *Proletarier*, No. 7, July 1927.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Proletarier*, No. 8, August 1927.

gaze. At each stage of the class-struggle the party has a primordial role, a kind of spirit of the revolution ...'.<sup>32</sup>

This implicitly rejected the position of Canne Meijer who counterposed an anti-political 'class-politics' to 'party-politics' and confronting other parties' activity among the proletariat.

The period of 'prosperity' characterised by reaction – like 1848 in Germany – bringing with it 'decline, confusion and disappointment' in the workers' movement, inevitably brought changes in the tactics of the revolutionary movement, where mass-action was no longer on the agenda. The KAPD would, therefore, have to remain a small party, the better to defend itself against the prevailing reaction. For him, it was a question of preserving 'the quality and correctness of its principles' and not blindly extending its field of activity. Pannekoek warned the KAPD against the intoxication of success: the 'flexible' tactic, which could only serve as an attempt to palliate the party's numerical weakness, had to be rejected. The price of emerging from its isolation was likely to be opportunism. Consequently, Pannekoek advised: more propaganda, less inflammatory agitation and less verbal activism in the press of the KAPD.

Pannekoek's warnings were yet more severe for the AAU, which most expressed the tactic of 'flexibility'. It had to guard against transforming itself into a trade-union organisation – 'one would find oneself faced with another *Zentrale*, nothing else'.<sup>33</sup> Its role was not to lead struggles, but to support them through its clarity. This was another way of saying – implicitly – that the *Union's* existence was superfluous in a period of reaction:

Like the KAP, the AAU is essentially an organ for the revolution. At other times, in a phase of the ebb of the revolution, nobody would think of founding such an organisation. But it is all that remains of the revolutionary years.<sup>34</sup>

Pannekoek's criticisms were, in part, founded on the critique of opportunism. Implicitly, they demonstrated the danger of the dual organisation. Either the KAPD dissolved the *Union*, which was no more than a glorious remnant of the revolution, or the *Union* dissolved the party, by posing as a hybrid politico-economic organisation. At all events, there was no room for two parties based on the same positions.

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

The weakness of Pannekoek's text 'Principles and Tactics' lay in a certain fatalism, which was pointed out by the KAPD.<sup>35</sup>

In a sense, in speculating on a new period of capitalist prosperity, Horner – Pannekoek's pseudonym – had a tendency to bury the revolution too quickly. He did not understand, as the KAPD demonstrated, that crises were no longer cyclical as they had been in the nineteenth century. His comparison with the situation after 1848 was not a valid one. In the epoch of the 'mortal crisis of capitalism', the brief periods of 'relative stabilisation' in no way prevented the outbreak of class movements in the form of wildcat-strikes, in which the party would have to intervene actively. The KAPD's preparation for new struggles that would be born of the immediate crisis was thus perfectly justified: 'capitalism in its monopolistic phase is like a powder-keg'.

Two years later, the Great Crash and the crisis that followed brutally disproved Pannekoek's optimistic predictions of a new period of capitalist 'prosperity', and confirmed those of the KAPD. The economic crisis saw the triumph of 'flexible tactics' and the *Union* carried the party with it, at the cost of dismembering the KAPD. The GIC, followed by Pannekoek, whose positions had evolved in the meantime, took a position in support of the AAU, of which it considered itself a part, within the international council-communist regroupment.

## 2 The GIC and the International Regroupment of Council-Communists (1929–32)

### 2.1 *The GIC and the German Council-Communist Movement – The Birth of the KAU (Communist Workers' Union)*

In 1929, the Ninth National Conference of the AAU decided to break all contact with the KAPD. The aim was to put an end to the leadership exercised by the KAPD. Significantly, using the pretext of 'factional activity', the conference decided to exclude Adam Scharrer, the KAPD's principal leader, and his brother-in-law Heinz Helm (Heinzelmann). This meant that a militant of the KAPD could no longer be a member of the AAU. A split ensued which weakened both the German and the international revolutionary movement, since in several countries (see below) groups were linked to the dual KAP-AAU organisation.

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35 *Proletarier*, No. 10–11, November 1927, 'Realpolitik und Revolution. Eine Antwort an Genossen K. Horner', by Carl Schlicht.

This split can be said to have given birth to council-communism at the international level. The KAPD – the revolutionary current that incarnated the spirit of the party and which had been the only real pole of regroupment of the internationalist left-communist current – was pushed into the background. A few hundred militants remained in the organisation, which grew isolated from the rest of the revolutionary political milieu now dominated by an anti-authoritarian ‘anti-leader’ ideology.

The evolution of the AAU was confused and contradictory. On the one hand, the *Union* adopted a more and more ‘flexible’ tactic, to the point that, for the first time in its history, it led a strike – exactly like a trade-union. In 1929, the Cuxhaven *Union* led a seamen’s strike. The KAPD saw this as the triumph of a ‘policy of horse-trading’, which consisted of ‘haggling with the capitalists around the table, while waiting for the proletariat to be strong enough to make the final assault’.<sup>36</sup> On the other hand, the AAU wanted to remain a political vanguard in the class-struggle. Discussions with what was left of the AAU-E were conducted with this in mind: a merger-conference was to be held in Berlin in December 1931. All the ‘foreign’ council-communist groups were invited to contribute to the effort of clarification – the GIC and Pannekoek foremost amongst them.

Along with the Mattick group, which still worked within the IWW in the US (Chicago), the GIC was one of the few groups to make serious contributions to the internal debate on the programme of the international council-communist movement. The GIC’s main theoretical contribution was the collective elaboration of Jan Appel’s work on *The fundamental principles of communist production and distribution*: this was published by the AAU in Berlin in 1930. It was the first draft of a text that the GIC continued to work on during the 1930s (see Chapter Seven). The texts on the function of revolutionary organisations were more immediately relevant in criticising the programme of the AAU.

The GIC, not without reason, rejected the AAU’s pretension, expressed in its draft-programme, of becoming a ‘mass-organisation’. The AAU could be neither a union nor a party. It should be considered as a collection of ‘revolutionary factory-nuclei’, whose main task was to propagandise for ‘an association of free and equal producers’.<sup>37</sup> At no time could the ‘factory-nuclei’ compete with the

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36 19 June 1929 letter from the KAPD to the communist workers’ groups of Czechoslovakia, in *L’Ouvrier communiste*, No. 4/5, 1929. In this letter, the KAPD noted, not unjustly, that ‘The recent crisis of our movement shows once again how the lack of working-class activity means disorganised agitation by the revolutionary movement. They compensate for the lack of proletarian mass-activity with displays of skill and “tactical subtlety”’.

37 PIC (in German), July 1931 (?), ‘Richtlinien über revolutionäre Betriebskerne’. These theses

trades-unions by putting forwards economic demands. Their task was, at the outbreak of wildcat-strikes, to contribute to the formation of a united 'class-front' across trades, 'free from any party or union'. Only in mass-struggle could 'factory-organisations' become a real 'class-organisation'.

Only these factory-organisations (*Betriebs-Organisation*), and not the 'factory-nuclei', could 'lead the struggle'. In general, they would disappear when the struggle ended. In any case, they could not become permanent organisations. Their permanence was conditioned solely by the upsurge of the revolution.

After the struggle, only the 'factory-nuclei' would remain, as a site of propaganda for the organisation of the class, of which they were the seed. They would be the most active and most conscious part of the class. Thus the *Union* would always remain a small nucleus.

If the class-struggle had to be 'free from any party', then logically any political organisation in party-form must be rejected in favour of a revolutionary-syndicalist type body, like the IWW. But for the GIC, this was by no means the case. Thus the GIC energetically rejected Mattick's proposal to make the AAU a section of the IWW in Europe.<sup>38</sup> This was out of the question, since the IWW rejected all party-action. In fact, the GIC rejected the existence, not of a political organisation, but of mass-parties 'leading' the mass-struggle, which it saw as a survival of a bygone period. It is significant that Pannekoek had rapidly modified his position on the party-question. For him, the vanguard-party aspiring to 'lead the class', had given way to 'nucleus-groups', which fulfilled the role of 'organisations of ideas'.<sup>39</sup> It is in this sense that one can call them 'parties'. They were necessary only as an expression of the 'spiritual struggle inside the movement'. As the KAPD pointed out, however, this theory looked like a rejection of the party.<sup>40</sup> It was the beginning of a process which was to lead the GIC and Pannekoek to reject all parties, even revolutionary ones (see Chapter Seven).

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on the revolutionary factory-nuclei were presented as a contribution of the GIC to the congress of 'Alarm-groups' at The Hague on 5 July. These anarchistic groups rejected participation in economic struggles.

38 *PIC* (in German), March 1931, 'Die Unterschiede zwischen der Auffassung der IWW in Amerika und der AAU in Deutschland'.

39 'Over het vraagstuk van de partijen', *PIC*, No. 7, May 1932. All Pannekoek's anonymous articles in the *PIC* are highlighted by asterisks in the IISG collection in Amsterdam.

40 *Proletarier*, No. 1, February 1933, 'Zur Frage der Partei', by Michel Blank. The author of the article, in the last issue of the KAPD's theoretical review, remarked that 'Now, comrade Pannekoek is trying to spread an ideology hostile to the party with Marxist foundations'.

In fact the GIC made a complete separation between the two principal functions of a revolutionary party: theoretical struggle ('clarification') and intervention in the class-struggle. The AAU was an organisation of intervention, and the 'parties' – groups for political reflection – coexisted with it. Like the unitary 'organisation of the class', the AAU had to prevent the formation of political fractions within itself,<sup>41</sup> and leave its members free to organise themselves outside, in the 'parties'.<sup>42</sup> This was the opinion of a majority of the GIC, which while rejecting the AAU-E's opposition of any kind of 'party', believed the existence of a 'dual organisation' to be necessary. But the two organisations had to be rigorously separated, and, in any case, the AAU should not be dominated politically by a party. This was also the opinion of the AAU.

It was on this basis that the merger of the AAU and the AAU-E took place at the unification-conference held in Berlin, from 24–27 December 1931. The new organisation, the KAU (Communist Workers' Union) brought together the 343 members of the AAU and the 57 members of the AAU-E.<sup>43</sup> Like the KAPD, it saw itself as a 'vanguard', a proletarian 'elite'.<sup>44</sup>

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41 *PIC*, undated (July 1931?), 'Die Gruppe internationaler Kommunisten Hollands zum Programmwurf der AAU'. This issue contained two texts by Pannekoek – unusually appearing under his real name – on the concept of the party as a 'nucleus-group'. An issue from 19 December 1931 – to be found in the IISG – contains several texts by the GIC, from both the majority and minority, on the question of the 'dual organisation' and the formation of fractions in the unions. The minority defended the AAU-E view hostile to all parties, be they nucleus-groups or 'dual organisations'.

42 *PIC*, 19 December 1931, 'Zur Frage der Doppelorganisation' (majority-view): 'We thus arrive at the conclusion, in opposition to the AAU-E, that one must leave *Union*-members free to organise themselves in parties, precisely because we are for the free expression of opinion, because we want to prevent the political struggle becoming a struggle for power inside the working class'.

43 Kool 1970, p. 152. Among them Ernst Pönisch (1903–1985?), carpenter in Pirna, close to Rühle's tendency, imprisoned by the Nazis in 1933, then fortunately released after a suicide attempt.

44 See Arthur Michaelis, the KAU's most prominent personality, during its founding congress: 'We are also a vanguard, an elite ...' (KAU 1932, p. 22). Yet an anti-centralisation conception existed alongside this vision. The KAU was a decentralised organisation: its organs were located in several different towns.

Arthur Michaelis (1888–1942), clerk in Berlin, prisoner of war, had belonged to the *Rote Armee* in the Ruhr in 1920: he was regarded – along with Erich Kunze [(1895–?); pseudonyms: Sachs, Sackermann in *Proletarier*, after 1924] – as the principal leader of the fighting-groups (*Kampforganisationen*) of the KAPD, operating under the cover of 'communist workers' sport-associations'. For this reason, he was condemned to several years in the fortress, but was amnestied in 1924 [see Ritter 1979]. A Jew, Arthur Michaelis was depor-



It was a party that dared not speak its name. It was a second ‘party’, alongside the KAPD. Its formation was the expression not of unity, but of a process of splits within the German revolutionary movement.

## 2.2 *The International Regroupment of Council-Communists*

Following the conference of December 1936, the GIC joined a very loose federation of national groups as its theoretical head. It abandoned the publication of its *Presse Material* in German (PIK), in favour of the Unionist review *INO* (*Internacia Novaj-Oficejo*) *Presse-Korrespondenz*. The latter was edited by the KAU’s international information-bureau in Frankfurt, whose task was to inform and regroup council-communist groups throughout the world.<sup>45</sup>

These groups had the peculiarity of being detached from the KAPD, rejecting the former’s conception of the party, to join with the German KAU and the Dutch GIC:

- The Danish KAPD, which had existed since the mid–20s, became the Group of International Communists (GIC) in 1930.<sup>46</sup> Initially, it published the review *Mod Strømen* (‘Against the Current’), then, at the end of October

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ted with transport from Berlin to Piaski Luterskie (Poland) on 28/03/1942, and murdered in Trawniki Lager. Siehe: *Gedenkbuch Berlins der jüdischen Opfer des Nationalsozialismus. Ihre Namen mögen nie vergessen werden*, Edition Hentrich, Freie Universität, Berlin, 1995.

45 This bureau, directed by Karl Kraus, an ex-member of the AAU-E, was in contact with all sorts of groups, including anarchists and syndicalists. The INO itself did not hesitate to publish texts from these currents, even though they were not council-communists. In 1932 Jean Dautry (1910–60), André Prudhommeaux (pseudonyms: André Jolibois and Cello) and Karl Kraus of Frankfurt published the *Correspondance internationale ouvrière/Internacia Novaj Oficejo* in Paris, Frankfurt and Nîmes.

46 The nucleus of Danish left-communism was formed in 1924 around the Andersen-Harilds, father and son. The father had lived with his family in Germany. A member first of the SPD, then of the USPD, and finally of the KPD, he had been expelled from Germany in 1922. He left the Danish CP in the mid–1920s. With his son Harald, he made contact with Dutch and German left-communism after 1926, forming the nucleus of a Danish KAPD. (See Collection Canne Meijer, IISG, maps 70, 96, and 240.) Both had tried to create a Danish ‘organisation of proletarian freethinkers’. This was a sizeable disagreement with German left-communism, which was hostile to these types of formations. After 1933, the GIK became an essential link in the underground-activity of German left-communism (see Chapter Seven). Information provided by Gerd Callesen, Copenhagen, Arbejderbevaegelsens Bibliotek og Archiv (ABA), in a letter to Philippe Bourrinet, 1 March 1984.

1931, the monthly journal *Marxistisk Arbejder-Politik* ('Marxist Workers' Politics'). The group was made up of 12 members, and had contacts with the oppositions inside the Danish CP.<sup>47</sup> Its orientation was strictly councilist, since it rejected any party. Its calls for 'the general strike' and 'direct action' even show a similarity with the anarchist current, some way removed from council-communism.

- The left-communists of Hungary (MBKSZ) worked under difficult conditions. The group was illegal, and faced with persecution by the police, fascist groups, and the organisations of the CP and social democracy.<sup>48</sup> Their propaganda found an echo in small fractions of the SP and CP. Within the council-communist movement, the MBKSZ was certainly the group that insisted most on an urgent international regroupment of existing forces.
- In the USA, the Unionist group of Chicago was formed inside the IWW around Paul Mattick. It worked both amongst the German immigrants and in the American left-communist milieu. Mattick had tried to form a KAP fraction within the small Proletarian Party of America, the third communist party formed in 1919. The United Workers' Party emerged from this 'party' at the beginning of the 1930s, and published the review *Council Correspondence*. Mattick, editor of the workers' paper *Chicagoer Arbeiter-Zeitung*, was very active in the unemployed-movement. The Mattick group was far from rejecting the necessity of a revolutionary party. He was the only one to insist on unity between the KAPD and the KAU.<sup>49</sup>

47 *Marxistisk Arbejder-Politik*, 'organ for Raads-Kommunismen', No. 2, May 1932.

48 'Brief aus Ungarn', in *Kampruf*, organ of the KAU, No. 12, July 1932. According to a circular from the International Information-Bureau, the MBKSZ was in contact with the IWW. The Hungarian group was also in close liaison with Bulgarian council-communists (see: 'An alle Gruppen der internationalen Rätekommunisten', in *Rundschreiben* No. 3, 15 June 1932). The letter can be found in the archives of Harild Andersen-Harild in the Arbejderbevaegelsens Bibliotek og Archiv (ABA), Copenhagen.

49 P.M. (Paul Mattick), 'Unsere Auffassung', in *Rätekorespondenz*, No. 8, 1931, theoretical review of the Unionist movement in Chicago:

'The party organises all consistent revolutionaries, even those of bourgeois origin, who join us. It regroups all revolutionary forces which do not base themselves on the place of work. It is organised by place of habitation; it is more a military than a propagandist organisation, although the one cannot exclude the other. It declares itself unreservedly for the AAU, that is for the elimination of the party during the seizure of power by the councils ... Until this moment, the party fulfils the function of shock-troops ... Without the AAU, the KAP is nothing: without the KAP, the AAU renounces an important aspect of the class-struggle. We can only recommend to the conference [that of December 1931] the renewal of the alliance with the KAP, just as we urge the KAPD to hasten this alliance. If the

- In France, the groups *Réveil communiste*, then *Ouvrier communiste*, and *Spartacus*, the first made up of Italian, the last of German workers (A. Heinrich's group), fell apart at the end of 1931.<sup>50</sup> With them, council-communism was to disappear from France for a long time to come. This highlighted the impossibility of links between the German-Dutch and the Italian communist lefts.<sup>51</sup>
- Outside of these groups, one can hardly speak of a real influence of council-communism. The split between the KAPD and the AAU had led certain national groups to link up with the KAPD alone. Although the KAPD in

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KAPD in the factories becomes rooted in the ground of party-dictatorship, in opposition to the dictatorship of the councils, we must automatically reject it. Only then would the need for a new party be on the agenda.'

It should be noted that Paul Mattick, in rejecting any factoryist vision and underlining the necessity for the revolutionary party, was not yet a 'councilist'. The vision of the party as 'shock-troops' was that of the KAPD at the beginning of the 1920s; but the assertion that the party must dissolve itself after the seizure of power shows a separation with the KAPD's position on the function of the party.

50 See Bourrinet 1999, Chapter Two.

51 The KAPD remained very suspicious of both Bordiga's current and the French opposition. It had a tendency to identify them with the Korsch current, which it rejected as opportunist. In 1926, the KAPD underlined the indecision of the Bordigist current, while noting that it stood outside the official line of the Comintern: 'Bordiga was a small exception in Italy; from time to time he made correct criticisms, without being able to indicate himself the exact revolutionary road' (*Zur Information*, No. 5, April 1926). Bordiga's fraction had begun as a real revolutionary current:

'In the soil of the Italian CP, there began to develop – in a spontaneous form – a real line of the international left. The influence that comrade Bordiga continued to exercise on this movement prevented the real development of this line, which inevitably sought to return to the position of the abstentionist anti-parliamentary fraction of 1919, since the latter was a transgression. Bordiga's activity left many émigré-workers numbed in immobility and absolute indifference; it chained them to the cart of the mechanical party-discipline of the Third International, and consequently to opportunism.'

But the Bordigist fraction had to be distinguished from the rest of the French opposition. The latter stood further to the right than the Korsch current: 'We see clearly that the groups of the French opposition have taken much the same line as Karl Korsch in Germany, even though we have to say that they are still further to the right'. Later in the same article, the KAPD waxes ironical about the 'graceful' and eclectic side of a 'petty-bourgeois opposition' which 'flies from one ideological flower to another'. The KAPD put this down, somewhat aptly, to a 'national narrowness', which 'is rather characteristic of the great theoreticians of the workers' movement from Proudhon to Jaurès', and explains this 'ideological lightness' of the French opposition ('Aus der Internationale: Frankreich', in *KAZ* (Berlin), No. 13, 1929).

Austria<sup>52</sup> had a small group active in Vienna, it was present, above all, among German-speaking workers in Czechoslovakia. In the industrial north of Bohemia, a strong opposition developed within the Czech CP. At the end of 1928 and early in 1929, a group was formed that identified itself with the KAPD's fight against the 'Comintern's opportunism' since its Third Congress. The Czech KAP *Propaganda-Gruppe* – led by the Sudeten journalist Kurt Weisskopf – had a strong presence in the industrial region of Gablonz (Jablonec); it published *Kampfbruf*, aimed at the Bohemian Unionist movement, then its political organ *Spartakus* from 1929–32. It had a large impact in the unemployed-movement: its anti-trades-union propaganda was listened to all the more readily because Czech workers had to join the trades-unions in order to receive the dole. In January 1932, five KAP delegates were elected by the action-committees and unemployed-assemblies to a regional conference of the unemployed.<sup>53</sup> Attacked by the police, the Czech KAP had been virtually illegal since 1931. Conscious of the need for underground-work, with the rise of Nazism in the Sudentenland, it joined up with the German *Rote Kämpfer* group of Schwab, Schröder, Reichenbach and Goldstein. The latter went underground in 1932, to prepare its 'cadres' for the illegal struggle.

The dispersal of all these groups – which, taken as a whole, had no political homogeneity – made a real international regroupment impossible. The proposal by the Hungarian left-communists in 1932 to hold an urgent international conference of council-communist groups was accepted by the KAU, but never realised. The Nazi dictatorship put this project on hold. It fell to the GIC, in 1935, to carry through the one and only attempt at regroupment by council-communists (see Chapter Seven).

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52 The Austrian group had existed since 1928: it was formed following the workers' insurrection in Vienna in 1927 ('Die KAP in Österreich', *KAZ*, No. 43, June 1928). Kurt Weisskopf (1907–1985), Czech-German KAPist in Prague, lived in London after 1938 and worked at the Reuters agency, using his wife's surname – Dowson. He published a book on *The Agony of Czechoslovakia 38/68* (London: Elek Books Ltd., 1968), published in French with a different title: *Coups de Prague 1938–1968* (Paris: Presses de la Cité, 1968).

53 See 'Die KAPD in Tchechoslowakei', in *KAZ*, No. 4, January 1929. See also *Spartakus, Zeitschrift für den Kommunismus*, Prague, No. 1, January 1932.

### 2.3 *The Attempted Regroupment of Council-Communists in the Netherlands (1932–3)*

The regroupment of council-communists in Germany had a dynamic effect in the Netherlands. Different groups began to intervene alongside the GIC. The seriousness of the situation had a large part to play in this. It was less the rise of Nazism than opposition to the policies of the Comintern that served to catalyse this regroupment.

The Comintern had decided to hold an ‘anti-war congress’ in Amsterdam in September 1932.<sup>54</sup> Officially, the idea of this pacifist congress had been launched by writers like Henri Barbusse, Romain Rolland, Gorky and Dos Passos. This congress was a turning-point for the Comintern. A pacifist and anti-fascist ideology was to be developed within the workers’ movement to ‘defend the USSR’. By appealing to ‘democrats’, it heralded the policy of the popular front.

The council-communists of Germany, France, the Netherlands, Hungary and Denmark distributed an appeal to the international proletariat<sup>55</sup> during this congress, as well as in the factories of their respective countries. Under the headline ‘Proletarians Remember!’, the appeal denounced the foreign policy of the Russian state and the Comintern since 1920, ‘a policy of military alliance with the imperialist states’ having nothing to do with ‘the revolutionary struggle of the Russian proletariat in 1917’. The international council-communists distinguished several stages in the Comintern’s abandonment of internationalism:

- 1920: the Russian-Polish war, fought not for the ‘world-revolution’, but ‘for the support of Russia allied to German imperialism’;
- 1922: the declaration by Bukharin at the Comintern’s Fourth Congress, in favour of ‘national defence’ and of ‘a military alliance with bourgeois states’;<sup>56</sup>
- 1923: the elaboration of the theory of ‘the exploited German nation’ and the delivery of grenades by the Russian state to the *Reichswehr*; the theory of

<sup>54</sup> See Cornelissen, Harmsen and De Jong 1965.

<sup>55</sup> ‘Het Anti-oorlogscongres der 3<sup>e</sup> Internationale’, in *Spartacus*, organ of the LAO, No. 7, 23 September 1932. The KAPD had supported the Red Army in 1920 during the Russian-Polish War.

<sup>56</sup> Bukharin’s 1922 speech: ‘Can proletarian states forge military alliances with bourgeois states? ... We can conclude a military alliance with one bourgeoisie to smash, by means of this bourgeois state, another bourgeoisie ...’ This same leader of the Comintern added: ‘With this form of national defence, of military alliance with bourgeois states, it is the duty of comrades in those countries to make a bloc for victory’ (Komintern 1923, p. 240).

- 'national liberation' against the Treaty of Versailles, leading to an alliance with the fascists in Germany;
- 1927: during the conflict between Poland and Lithuania, the Comintern called on Lithuanian workers to 'defend their country's independence'.<sup>57</sup>

The appeal, directed against the politics of the Third International, also denounced those of Trotsky. He spread the illusion that the 'Red Camp' was 'still a factor for the world-revolution'. Now, however, Russia would not come to the aid of the 'proletariat threatened by fascism'. For the workers, the question was neither to struggle for peace nor to defend the USSR, but to struggle for the proletarian revolution against their own bourgeoisie, by revolutionary mass action and the sabotage of war production. The road of world-revolution, with the creation of workers' councils, was the only way to prevent world-war.

This common appeal of international council-communists was one of the few to be distributed simultaneously. In the same year, it led to one of the rare attempts at regrouping the council-communist current in the Netherlands. The appeal was signed by the GIC and the LAO, and supported by other Dutch groups.

A joint conference of Dutch council-communists (it was to be both the first and the last) took place in The Hague on 12–13 November 1932.<sup>58</sup> Several groups were present, to take positions on the class-struggle and on intervention in the economic struggle:

- the remnants of the KAPN: that party was profoundly divided on participation in wage-struggles. The majority, in Amsterdam, around Bram and Emmanuel Korper and Frits Kief, considered that economic struggles led workers to defeat after defeat. The minority in The Hague,<sup>59</sup> like the GIC, asserted forcefully that 'each wage-struggle, because of the capitalist crisis, carries in itself the seed of a revolutionary movement'.<sup>60</sup> At the beginning of

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57 'The popular masses of Lithuania have a great task before them: to defend the independence of their country ... Arm yourselves to repulse the Polish imperialists ... Soldiers of the Lithuanian Army! Arise to defend the independence of Lithuania ... Down with the conquest of Lithuania by Polish imperialism ...' (*Inprecorr*, No. 71, 1927, p. 1620.)

58 'De Radenbijeekkomst in Den Haag', in *PIC*, No. 19, 1932.

59 The Hague group was a small group of workers whose main 'personalities' were Arie Bom, from the KAPN, and Rinus Pelgrom (1902–60), who had belonged to the LAO. Cajo Brendel, a future member of the *Daad en Gedachte* group, which survived until 1998, was a member of the Hague group from 1934.

60 *INO – Presse-Korrespondenz*, No. 23, 1 December 1932.

1933, it separated from the moribund KAPN to publish *De Radencommunist* ('The Council-Communist'). The latter was the expression of the Councils-Group in The Hague;

- the *Linkse Arbeiders Oppositie* (LAO – Workers' Left-Opposition) appeared in July 1932 with the publication of its organ *Spartacus*.<sup>61</sup> It was active in Rotterdam and Leiden. The LAO was very workerist, and implicitly defended the theory of 'minority-violence'. Its concern was to 'provoke class-conflicts'. This councilist organisation was dominated by the personality of Eduard Sirach (1895–1937). During the First World-War, he had been one of the leaders of the mutinies which broke out on the battleships *Regent* and *Zeven Provinciën*. For that he had been condemned to a long prison sentence. He escaped from prison and went to Germany in December 1918, where he took part of the revolutionary fights. Subsequently living in Amsterdam and Rotterdam, and without any stable work, in 1924 he joined the CPN – which presented him as a candidate in the elections – and the NAS. He joined Sneeuvliet's RSP, but was expelled. In Leiden, the LAO was in close contact with Van der Lubbe, who took part in its activities. Clearly seduced by the theory of minority-violence, he burned down the Reichstag some months later. The question of 'exemplary acts' provoked lively debates in the council-communist movement (see below).

Other groups and unorganised individuals were also present. Alongside the concentration of council-communists in Utrecht, there was an anarchist organisation: the *Bond van Anarchisten-Socialisten* (BAS). These dispersed forces were typical of a strongly localist movement, allergic to any idea of centralisation. The presence of an anarchist group like the BAS was characteristic: it proved that the demarcation between council-communism and anarchism was not very sharp. This was clear to the GIC, but not to the other groups.

The conference did, however, have positive results, in the immediate if not in the long term. It established criteria delineating the council-communist movement: participation in economic struggles was the principle criterion. As a result, the majority of the KAPN left the movement, to bring out its own review: *De Arbeidersraad* ('The Workers' Council') in 1933. Although a champion of the party, like the old KAPN, this group gradually evolved towards Trotskyist and even anti-fascist positions (see Chapter Seven). The second positive result was the publication of texts in the different reviews, coming

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61 For the history of the LAO, which Marinus van der Lubbe either joined or worked with, see Karasek 1980.

from the movement as a whole, as well as the joint distribution of pamphlets.<sup>62</sup> Finally, the election of a joint commission of the groups apparently showed an active concern to regroup in the future.

However, this unique attempt at uniting groups with a 'councilist' orientation was to be a failure. The opening of a counter-revolutionary course, after Hitler's accession to power in 1933, only accentuated the centrifugal tendencies within the Dutch movement, as it did elsewhere in the international 'councilist' movement.

### 3 Hitler's Coming-To-Power and Its Consequences – The GIC and the German Situation

Exclusively preoccupied with the questions agitating the Unionist movement in Germany, the GIC paid little attention to the rise of Nazism, a striking sign of the counter-revolution on the march. The questions of organisation of the *Unionen*, of the economic crisis, and the more theoretical ones of the peasantry and the period of transition (see below) seemed more important. This weakness, when faced with a political problem as urgent as the rise of the counter-revolution, was the result of a failure to evaluate the historical period thoroughly. For them, class-movements would inevitably be born of the world-crisis, in the form of wildcat-strikes, which would lead directly to the revolution.

As a current of the communist left, the GIC considered the Nazi movement as the expression of the offensive of 'monopolist capitalism' against the proletariat, whose social base was the petty-bourgeoisie proletarianised by the crisis. To combat Nazism, the only proletarian tactic was the resurgence of massive class-struggle, in the form of spontaneous anti-union movements. Any attempt at anti-fascist alliances with the left-parties would lead to the betrayal of proletarian principles. To beat Nazism, the German proletariat could only count on itself and, above all, on the resurgence of international class-struggle in the main centres of capitalism. The GIC, like the German revolutionary groups (KAPD, KAU) and the council-communist groups in the USA and elsewhere, intransigently rejected the anti-fascist united front.<sup>63</sup> For them, German Social

62 Anti-parliamentary pamphlets were distributed by the GIC, the LAO, and the *Radencommunist* group: 3,000 copies of *Kiest Kobus onze man!*, and an (anonymous) pamphlet by Pannekoek, *De arbeiders, het parlement en het communisme* were distributed in 1933.

63 Thus the KAZ wrote in 1932:

'A United Front with "each and every one" of such people, completely forgets each and every SPD act since 1914; this would mean forgetting the sea of proletarian blood – no less



Democracy and the KPD had taken part in the crushing of the proletariat: the SPD physically in 1919, and the KPD ideologically in competing with the Nazi movement on nationalist terrain from 1923 onwards. At the end of 1932, the KAPD stressed that 'Hitler encompassed the heritage of Noske, the party of Hitler the heritage of Social Democracy'.<sup>64</sup> As for the KPD, 'it has raised demagoguery to a principle, and it has been beaten by the master of demagoguery, Hitler'.<sup>65</sup> The disastrous result of this policy of ideological diversion was that 'a great part of the KPD's supporters went over to Hitler'.<sup>66</sup>

It was only at the end of 1932 that the GIC began to evaluate the perspectives for the workers' movement arising from the fascist wave. The Nazi movement corresponded to the attempt by big capital to establish 'the absolute dictatorship of the possessing classes' with the support of the middle-classes.<sup>67</sup> The GIC's analysis was completely banal, and showed a lack of political depth which was only to be overcome after Hitler's coming-to-power. The Dutch remained optimistic. While they emphasised that fascism had no solution to offer on the economic level, they thought that it would bring 'the most violent class-struggle'.

Hitler's accession to power finally forced the GIC to adopt a sharper political position. It is significant that Pannekoek took up the pen to orientate council-communist policy more concretely.<sup>68</sup> He tried to analyse the causes and consequences of the proletarian defeat in Germany, as well as the immediate and long-term perspectives for workers and revolutionaries throughout the world:

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than that spilt by the brown plague – that the SPD has spilt in the interests of capital ... fascism is not opposed to bourgeois democracy: on the contrary, it is its continuation by other means. Every party that has a bourgeois policy, even if one finds groups of workers in its ranks, is an accomplice of fascism and, at the same time, one of its fractions. A united front with these gentlemen, for the sole reason that they claim to defend "workers' interests", is to abandon socialism and push the workers into the fascist bandwagon' ('From 'Einheitsfront und Einheitsfronttaktik', in *KAZ* (Berlin), No. 7, July 1932).

Although *Kampruf*, the organ of the KAU, had the same position as the KAPD, locally some sections of the KAU gave in to the temptation of the anti-fascist united front. Thus in 1932, the Leipzig section joined the SAP in an anti-fascist front. It was the same for the Pirna section in Saxony (see *KAZ* No. 7, July 1932) together with the SPD and the KPD.

64 See KAPD 1932, p. 7.

65 KAPD 1932.

66 Ibid.

67 GIC pamphlet: *De Beweging van het kapitalistisch bedrijfsleven* ('The Movement of Capitalist Industry'), October 1932, pp. 34–5. The author was B.A. Sijes.

68 Anonymous (Pannekoek), 'De omwenteling in Duitsland', *PIC*, No. 9, April 1933.

*The defeat of the German proletariat:* like the Italian communist left in 1933,<sup>69</sup> Pannekoek showed clearly that the final triumph of Hitler completed the Social-Democratic counter-revolution begun in November 1918 with the coming-to-power of Ebert and Scheidemann. Like an astronomical revolution, the counter-revolution had completed its rotation. Hitler did not come to power to prevent the outbreak of the revolution – the Stalinist thesis at the time<sup>70</sup> – but to complete the counter-revolution begun fourteen years earlier by German Social Democracy:

One can in no way call a ‘counter-revolution’ the full-circle movement (‘revolution’) in Germany, since that presupposes a revolution preceding it. The true counter-revolution began on 9 November 1918 in Berlin, when Ebert and Scheidemann entered the government.<sup>71</sup>

The establishment of a ‘society of violence’, the replacement of parliamentarism by a dictatorial government, the ‘suppression of bourgeois liberties and the most elementary human rights for certain groups of the population’, concentration-camps for SPD and KPD members, the persecution of the Jews, were all so many facts that showed that the counter-revolution had come full circle.

It was the global economic crisis that allowed big capital to complete the counter-revolution. To lead its ‘assault against the proletariat’ German capital found its auxiliary-troops in the Nazi movement, whose cadres were petty-bourgeois students and army-officers. Economically, Nazism corresponded to the attempt by German capital to achieve ‘a certain autarchy’.

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69 See Bourrinet 1999, Chapters Three and Four.

70 Following the analysis of the Comintern, the KPD thus declared in 1930: ‘The progress of fascism is in no way the sign of the ebb of the proletarian movement, but, on the contrary, the counterpart to its revolutionary rise, the necessary accompaniment to the maturation of a revolutionary situation’ (*Rote Fahne*, 15 June 1930). Thus Nazism was considered as the necessary last stage of the revolution. We know what was the practical result of this ‘theory’ in the German situation... Before the GIC, the KAPD had already in 1928 clearly demonstrated the real significance of fascism, ‘It is nonsense to define fascism as a means of the defence [*of capital*] against the persistent threat of proletarian mass-action. It is more the consequence of a deficiency of the proletariat, which, because of the economic pressure born of postwar relationships, had started the insurrection. Its role is to accelerate capitalist reconstruction’: *KAZ* No. 48, 1928. Like the Italian left, the German left showed the interpenetration of fascism and democracy: ‘Democracy fascises itself, it readily makes alliances with dictators; and the dictators cloak themselves in democracy’: *KAZ* (Berlin) No. 7, 14 February 1931.

71 Anonymous (Pannekoek), ‘De omwenteling in Duitsland’, *PIC*, No. 9, April 1933.

The other factor in the defeat of the German proletariat was, above all, ideological: the diversion of its struggle onto the electoral terrain, the terrain of the Social Democracy. It was the worst of defeats: the collapse of proletarian strength without a fight. 'A defeat in itself is not severe, the working class will suffer frequent defeats if it struggles with insufficient force against a stronger capital, and such defeats are the source of ultimate victories. But here, it was a collapse, without struggle, because the workers only elected Social Democrats and had not learnt to fight in a revolutionary way'.<sup>72</sup>

Pannekoek's political conclusion was clear: the road from Ebert to Hitler was the unfolding of the 'Social-Democratic catastrophe'. The Social Democracy could no longer be considered as part of the workers' movement. Like the GIC however, Pannekoek hesitated to situate Social Democracy as a political fraction of the bourgeoisie. This hesitation undoubtedly lies at the source of his later distinction between the 'old' and 'new' workers' movement: 'Social Democracy is an old dead branch of the tree of the workers' movement and underneath it, barely visible, until now stifled by it, new shoots are budding'.<sup>73</sup>

The responsibility of the KPD in the defeat of the German proletariat was just as great. It is significant that Pannekoek spoke almost exclusively of the adoption of union- and parliamentary tactics and submission to Russian state-capitalism as the causes of the KPD's bankruptcy in 1933. Denouncing the KPD's 'party-fanaticism', Pannekoek ignored the decisive effect of its politics in the late 1920s: the theories of 'social fascism' and of 'German national liberation', the united front with the Nazis in strikes. He noted, without going into depth as to the real causes of the defeat, that the communists thrown into concentration-camps were 'the victims of the false policies of the KPD, which could only lead to the impotence of the German working class'.<sup>74</sup>

*Proletarian autonomy*: the remedy for defeat could not be found in the slogan of an economic boycott of Germany, launched by the Dutch anarcho-syndicalists.<sup>75</sup> By adopting this slogan, the workers could only aggravate their defeat by reinforcing nationalism: a new 4 August 1914, and a new war, would be the ultimate consequence, 'under the cover of fine humanitarian intentions' 'The only result would be the following: in Germany, nationalism is reinforced

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> This boycott-campaign had been launched internationally by 'left-socialists' and anarchist groups. It accompanied the formation of 'anti-fascist committees'.

and the struggle for communist clarification hindered. From this, we would get a second 1914 as soon as the workers in all the belligerent countries resigned themselves to the imperialist warmongering of their own bourgeoisie and supported it.<sup>76</sup>

The only proletarian line in the struggle against Nazism was, above all else, the struggle of the German and international proletariat on its class-terrain:

The struggle against National Socialism is the struggle against big German capital. Only the German working class can carry out this struggle. Hitler can only be defeated by German workers ... Can the workers of other countries, those of Western Europe or even America, do nothing to help their heavily oppressed comrades in Germany? Of course they can. First and foremost, by clearly and vigorously conducting the struggle against their own bourgeoisie. Each example of a vigorous class-struggle in one country has a stimulating and clarifying effect on workers in other countries.<sup>77</sup>

*The perspectives of the workers' movement:* Pannekoek and the GIC viewed the future of the German revolutionary movement with a certain optimism. They considered that the 'spiritual force' of the old workers' movement was 'destroyed', underestimating its ideological weight, even in clandestinity. According to them, 'young forces' would emerge and find in the literature of the KAU, the KAPD, and of *Rote Kämpfer* the source of their clarification. This hope was quickly dashed. Pannekoek affirmed that communism 'would be constructed on totally new bases'. That meant that there was no longer a continuity in the workers' movement through its 'left-fractions'. In a sense, everything had to begin again from scratch. This method – totally different from that of the Italian communist left at the time – heralded the theory of the 'new workers' movement', which was to prove fatal to council-communism.<sup>78</sup>

#### 4 Dutch Council-Communism and Van der Lubbe

It was the significance of Van der Lubbe's torching of the Reichstag (27 February 1933), more than Hitler's coming to power, that gave focus to debates within

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<sup>76</sup> Anonymous (Pannekoek), 'De omwenteling in Duitsland', in *PIC*, No. 9, April 1933.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> See Bourrinet 1999.

Dutch council-communism. The latter was profoundly divided on the question of 'exemplary acts' and of individual violence against symbols of bourgeois order.

Marinus Van der Lubbe, born in 1909, was a young builder's mason from Leiden. He had been in the Dutch CP from 1925–31. He left upon adopting anti-parliamentarist and council-communist positions. He was highly active in the unemployed-movement and in the workers' strikes that broke out in various towns. After leaving the Unemployed-Agitation Committee (WAC) – led by the CPN – in October–November 1932 he was the main editor of the review for unemployed people in Leiden, *Werkloozenkrant*, which called for autonomous action-committees, independent from any political party. Van der Lubbe was a worker wholly devoted to the proletarian cause. Pensioned-off following an injury at work that threatened eventually to blind him, he devoted all his time to militant-activity. He soon made contact with Eduard Sirach's LAO and helped in its propaganda-work. If he had any contacts with the GIC in Leiden, they remained personal.<sup>79</sup> Van der Lubbe was never a member of the GIC, even if he sympathised with their positions and was a reader of the *PIC*.

After several trips to Germany and around Europe (Hungary, Yugoslavia, Austria) to discover by himself the real state of the class-struggle, Van der Lubbe decided to go to Berlin in February 1933, shortly after Hitler's nomination as Chancellor (30 January). He arrived in the city on 18 February. He took part in meetings of the SPD and KPD and sought contact with the Berlin homeless (*Obdachlosen*). He was able to make political contacts (23 and 25 February) with German council-communists, with Alfred Weiland and some members of the KAU, who eyed the young Dutch worker suspiciously. He was – according to Weiland<sup>80</sup> – very enthusiastic for the recent mutiny near the coast of Indonesia, led by the sailors of the Dutch battleship *Zeven Provinciën* (4–10 February) in protest against ten percent wage-cuts. It was ultimately bloodily crushed by aerial bombardment, upon the orders of the Colijn cabinet.

79 Van der Lubbe had personal and political contacts with Piet van Albada, a medical student, brother of the astronomer Bruun van Albada, the stone-mason and ex-CPN member Simon Harteveld, and the brothers, Izaak (Sjaak) – a taxi driver – and Jacobus (Koos). Active in the GIC in Leiden was Axel Koefoed, who was in charge of the international ties. According to a former member of the GIC, Lieuwe Hornstra, Van der Lubbe 'had no contact with the GIC. Personally, with people like Koos de Vink for example, certainly: but not organisationally': cited in Karasek 1980, p. 81.

80 Weiland's testimony seems very dubious. The AAU and KAU had no contact with Van der Lubbe and the LAO. See Jassies 2004.

On the night of 25 February, he attempted to burn down an office for the unemployed and a castle in Berlin, without any success. After leaving the capital, he returned to Berlin to torch the Reichstag. His decision to burn down the Reichstag may have been a personal one<sup>81</sup> motivated as much by the naive

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81 The attempts to present Van der Lubbe as a 'Nazi agent' were 'demolished' by the 'Red Book' (*Roodboek*), edited by Lo Lopes Cardoso, a former member of the KAPN, and published in 1933: see Dekker, Lopes Cardoso, Verduin and Van Agen 1983. See also M. Kubina 2001 pp. 113–26, on the brief (and informal) contacts between the KAU and Van der Lubbe.

Nonetheless, according to Alfred Weiland, whose testimony is contradictory, Van der Lubbe had been in contact with the student Wilfried von Oven (1912–2008), who was a member of the 'left' SA and had in the past (1932) had a brief contact with an AAU circle in Berlin. In the 1990s, Von Oven denied any contact with Van der Lubbe. In 1936, Von Oven, a convinced Nazi, was a volunteer in the 'Condor Legion', during the civil war in Spain; in 1943, he became a personal adviser to Goebbels. After the war, he became the South-America press-correspondent of *Der Spiegel*. He remained a Nazi and published a book on the SA in 1998: *Mit ruhig festem Schritt: Aus der Geschichte der SA*. He was active on the extreme right, publishing the fascist *Plata Ruf* in Argentina 1998. See M. Kubina 2001.

In the opinion of the historian Alexander Bahar and the psychologist Wilfried Kugel, whose book's title translates as 'The Reichstag Fire: How History is Created' (Bahar and Kugel 2001) Van der Lubbe had been conveyed by SA into the building:

'On February 27 1933 at 8 p.m., a commando-group of at least three, and at most ten, SA men led by Hans Georg Gewehr entered the basement of the palace of the Reichstag-President. The group took the incendiary substances deposited there, and used the underground passageway to go from the Reichstag-President's palace to the Reichstag-building, where they prepared the assembly-hall in particular with a self-igniting liquid, which they had probably mixed in the hall. After a certain latency-period, the liquid set off the fire in the assembly-hall. The group made their getaway through the underground passageway and the basement of the Reichstag-President's palace (and possibly also through the adjacent basement leading to the machinery and government-employees' building) to the public street Reichstagsufer. Göring entered the burning Reichstag-building at 9:21 p.m. at the latest, presumably in order to provide a cover for the commando-group's retreat ... Van der Lubbe was brought to the Reichstag by the SA at exactly 9 p.m. and let into the building by them. The sound of breaking glass, which was noticed by witnesses and which was allegedly due to Van der Lubbe breaking window-panes to get into the building, was probably only intended to attract the attention of the public. The Dutchman was sacrificed as the only available witness.'

This thesis cannot convince every impartial historian, because it seems to be the product of dubious testimonies. See Jassies 2002.

Van der Lubbe constantly denied any conspiracy was behind the arson: 'As to the question of whether I acted alone, I declare emphatically that this was the case' (Marinus van der Lubbe, statement to police, 3 March 1933.)

In 1967, the county-court of Berlin broke with the Leipzig verdict and sentenced Van

belief that his 'exemplary action' would 'awaken' the German proletariat as much as out of personal despair (Van der Lubbe was condemned to imminent blindness). But above all, this personal despair expressed a growing political despair in the deepest layers of the proletariat.

We know what happened to Van der Lubbe. Dragged before Nazi 'justice', he denied having had contacts with the KPD or the 'councilist' milieu in Berlin. He was condemned to death (23 December 1933) and beheaded on 10 January 1934, one of the first victims of Nazi terror. For his friends, this execution was the logical continuation of the bourgeois terror that had struck down so many workers under governments from Ebert to Hitler. But the worst for Van der Lubbe was to be dragged in the mud by the Stalinists, who accused him of being in the service of Nazism and began a great campaign of slander. The Dutch CP accused him of being in the service of the Dutch police and being one of the Röhm gang's 'toy-boys'. The Stalinists were his executioners every bit as much as the Nazis, and had no hesitation in demanding his death. Dimitrov (Van der Lubbe's supposed accomplice), who was to be acquitted and become one of the principal leaders of the Stalinised Comintern, even demanded in open court that Van der Lubbe should be 'condemned to death for having worked against the proletariat'.<sup>82</sup>

In the Netherlands, the CPH – despite Van der Lubbe's having been an active party-member – developed the same campaign of slanders. It propagated the lies contained in the 'Brown Book' published by the Münzenberg Trust – the latter being the Comintern's great financial wizard – with the support of 'democrats' that included an English lord. To defend Van der Lubbe the council-communists produced a 'Red Book' (*Roodboek*), which used a multitude of testimonies to dismantle point-by-point the accusations against him.<sup>83</sup> A Van der Lubbe committee was formed, made up of a member of the ex-KAPN, Lo

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der Lubbe *post mortem* to eight years' imprisonment for 'attempted arson with house-breaking'. In 1980, the same court in Berlin pronounced a verdict of not guilty, a verdict that was overturned by the court of Kassel in 1983.

A 1998 Dutch documentary by Joost Seelen was devoted to Marinus: *Water en vuur* ('Water and fervour'). De roerige geschiedenis rond Marinus van der Lubbe (1909–1934), Zuidenwind Filmproducties, Breda, 90 minutes, vhs. In February and June 2000, a commemorative plaque for Van der Lubbe was twice erected in Berlin, the first one having being stolen.

82 *L'Humanité*, 17 December 1933.

83 The translation in French of the *Roodboek* can be found, with numerous testimonies from Van der Lubbe's comrades, in the *Revue anarchiste*, No. 19, March 1934: 'Van der Lubbe et les mensonges du Livre brun (avec témoignages et pièces justificatives)'.

Lopes-Cardoso; a member of the GIC, the psychiatrist Lieuwe Hornstra (1908–90); and the proletarian writer Maurits Dekker (1896–1962). This committee had offshoots in several countries, including France.<sup>84</sup> It was, in fact, a cartel of groups and personalities, not very distinct from anarchism, since anarchists were included in it.<sup>85</sup>

The formation of this committee could not prevent a debate from emerging within Dutch council-communism on the significance of ‘personal acts’ and of terrorism in general. On the one hand, there were those who considered them ‘proletarian acts’, and on the other, those who rejected all terrorist-action on principle.

The first tendency, supported by the German council-communists,<sup>86</sup> was motivated as much by a reluctance to ‘run with the hounds’ as by political confusion. It saw in the Reichstag fire not an act of despair, but a proletarian deed that in other circumstances could ‘awaken’ the German proletariat and draw it

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84 André Prudhommeaux (1902–68) was part of this committee in France, which published numerous documents in French, such as *Marinus Van der Lubbe: prolétaire ou provocateur* (Van Agen 1933), reprinted as a pamphlet in September 1971 by the ‘Librairie La Vieille Taupe’. This pamphlet – by a textile-worker, Age van Agen, was first published in Dutch.

Leo Hornstra had been a member of the CPN until 1927. A psychoanalyst and Friesian poet, he became a council-communist after 1928. In 1958 he converted to Catholicism. Living in Friesland, after 1960, he styled himself as a ‘Friesian nationalist’.

Maurits Dekker was not linked to the council-communist movement. An autodidact, born in Jewish working-class Amsterdam, a poet, then novelist. He began to publish in 1923 (*Homo cantat*). In 1926 he published a novel in which mankind is subjected to the power of machines and the state. In 1929, since his novels were neglected by critics, he published a famous novel under the pseudonym ‘Boris Robazki’ (*Waarom ik niet kankzinnig ben*). He obtained renown as ‘social novelist’. In 1933, he was – with Jacques Gans, Jef Last and Frans Goedhart – an important initiator of the Dutch association of proletarian writers *Links Richten*, which in 1932–3 published an eponymous periodical. Dekker, an ex-fellow-traveller of the CPN who supported van der Lubbe, was denounced as ‘petty-bourgeois’ by the CP and Jef Last within *Links Richten*. Literarily active, Dekker wrote novels on the Dutch Beggars’ revolt. After having written a pamphlet against Hitler in 1937, he was sentenced to a fine in 1938 for ‘offending a friendly head of state’ (sic). After the war he won accolades for literature. Outside the Netherlands, he was known for his historical novel *Beggars’ revolt* and, above all, for his 1950 drama *The world has no waiting room*, a play about the responsibility of atomic scientists after Hiroshima, which was translated into many languages.

See Donkersloot 1963, pp. 94–8; BWN 1989; and Sicking 1994.

85 The GIC did not associate itself with this committee, but let some of its members like Lieuwe (Leo) Hornstra do so.

86 The KAU seems to have held this position. The KAPD’s is not known.



into struggle.<sup>87</sup> The reaction of groups like the LAO and the *Radencommunist* grouping was typical in this respect.

*Spartacus*, organ of the LAO, while exalting Van der Lubbe – ‘an intrepid fighter, ready to sacrifice himself for communism’ – had a contradictory middle-position on the significance of individual terrorist-acts. On the one hand, the LAO declared that: ‘We do not advocate individual terror as a method of struggle of the working class’. On the other hand, it implicitly supported it: ‘that does not mean that we reject every individual action ...’ In effect, the LAO ended up defending the position that individual terrorist-action could bring the working classes into action: ‘The gesture of Van der Lubbe could be the signal for generalised workers’ resistance over the heads of the goons of the Socialist and Communist parties.’<sup>88</sup>

The position of the *Radencommunist* group was practically the same. It denied that the act of Van der Lubbe was one of individual desperation, corresponding to a profound disorientation in the proletariat: ‘Moreover this act must not be considered as an individual act, but rather a spark which, in this violently strained situation, could bring about the explosion.’<sup>89</sup> In this sense,

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87 Lehmann, a member of German ‘worker-communist groups’ in exile in Paris, wrote in the *Revue anarchiste* No. 19, March 1934:

‘Only a daring act – repeated and followed by similar ones – could save the situation. Thus [Van der Lubbe] set fire to the Reichstag as a beacon of a new social order ... But for the leaders of the KPD and SPD, Van der Lubbe’s action was an excuse for their own worthlessness and political bankruptcy. This is why they refuse so obstinately to recognise Van der Lubbe’s action as a revolutionary act.’

The position of the Italian communist left was somewhat similar and just as ambiguous: ‘Communists have never participated in these unanimous concerts against terrorist-acts and – on each occasion – they silence the chorus of hypocritical lamentations and cowardly exonerations, and may, in certain circumstances, not proclaim their on-principle opposition to terrorist-acts. That could play the game of the enemy who exploits these events in order to extirpate from the brains of the working class the idea of the necessity of violence’. But the Italian communist left did not take an explicit position on Van der Lubbe’s individual case: communists ‘do not have the duty to pronounce for or against: they have the duty to explain that in the face of the assassinations of workers by social democrats or fascists, a proletarian’s gesture against the Reichstag ultimately has no more significance than a brick thrown into a sea of workers’ blood’ (‘Van der Lubbe: les fascistes exécuteur, socialistes et centristes applaudissent’, *Bilan*, Brussels, No. 3, January 1934).

88 All quotes from *Spartacus*, No. 19, March 1933.

89 ‘De brand in het Rijksdaggebouw. De meening van de Int. Communisten en KAP’ers’, *Spartacus*, No. 19, 9 March 1934.

the groups rejected the evidence of history: a terrorist-action, individual or not, may be used by the dominant class to reinforce its oppression and its repression of the proletariat. In the final analysis, their position was very close to that of the Social-Revolutionaries before 1917 in Russia.

The second tendency sharply rejected the use of individual acts and terrorism as a method of class-struggle. This was the case with the *Arbeidersraad* group (the Korpers' group) – which came from the KAPN – and of the GIC. But their reasons were radically different. For *De Arbeidersraad* – it had been said at Van der Lubbe's trial that he was a member of the KAPN – it was more a question of rejecting the person of Van der Lubbe than defending a classic position of the Marxist movement that 'the motor-force of the workers' revolution has never been individual terror or putschism, but the crisis of capitalism itself'.<sup>90</sup> By insisting heavily on the fact that nobody amongst them had 'heard of Van der Lubbe', and that his action could have 'a counter-revolutionary effect', it clearly refused any elementary solidarity with a victim of repression. This ambiguous attitude heralded a political evolution that led certain members towards Trotskyism, and finally the Communist Party.<sup>91</sup>

The attitude of the GIC was much less ambiguous. While declaring its solidarity with Van der Lubbe as a victim of Nazism and Stalinism, the GIC insisted that the young Dutch worker had clearly shown a 'death wish in such an act', but that no-one should 'reproach him for it'.<sup>92</sup> Once this solidarity was clearly proclaimed the GIC repeated the position of the German communist left in the 1920s:

The task of a real revolutionary grouping can only be to strengthen the class by spreading a clear conception of social relations, of the questions of organisation and tactics. It is not up to us to make the masses move;

<sup>90</sup> Verklaring, in *De Arbeidersraad*, Amsterdam, 2 October 1933.

<sup>91</sup> This was the case with the Korpers. Frits Kief (1908–1976), an electrical technician of German origin, was the husband of Rosa Korper (Bram Korper's sister), and wrote in the weekly anarchist review *De Arbeider*. He joined the Dutch Resistance during the war. After 1945, journalist; he was editor of the review *De Vlam* (1946–52), legal continuation of the underground socialist-pacifist review *De Vonk* (1941–45). He was active until 1959 in the PvdA – in a left-wing tendency ('*Sociaal-Democratisch Centrum*' – SDC) – which he then left. He became a member of the PSP (Pacifist Socialist Party) in 1965, then a propagandist of the 'freethinkers movement'. (See: H. de Liagre Böhl, 'Kief, Carl Friedrich (1908–1976)', in *Biografisch Woordenboek van Nederland* 4, The Hague 1994).

<sup>92</sup> *Spartacus*, No. 19, 9 March 1933. The GIC's leaflet has also been translated into French in the *Revue anarchiste*, No. 19, Paris, March 1934, pp. 41–2.

that can only be the necessary result of social relations. Our task is only to help the masses in movement to find the right track.<sup>93</sup>

More profoundly, Pannekoek – in an article in the *PIC*<sup>94</sup> – showed that any ‘personal act’ like that of Van der Lubbe, could only obscure the class-consciousness of the proletariat. This ‘personal act’ could only have value ‘as part of a mass-movement’: ‘In this framework, the audacity of the bravest finds expression in personal acts of courage, while the clear understanding of others directs these acts towards their goal so as not to lose their fruits.’<sup>95</sup> Separated from mass-action, all individual acts, far from weakening the bourgeoisie, can only reinforce it. This was precisely the case with the burning of the Reichstag: ‘The bourgeoisie has not been the least affected by the burning of the Reichstag; its domination has in no way been weakened. The government, on the contrary, has used the opportunity to considerably reinforce its terror against the workers’ movement.’<sup>96</sup>

Ideologically, such action had no power ‘against abject electoralism’ and bourgeois democracy. Democratic illusions could always take ‘another track’; for example, when the ‘right to vote’ is suppressed, then the mystification of ‘the conquest of real democracy is put forward’ by the ‘democratic’ bourgeoisie. In the second place, historically, individual terrorist-action has had no mobilising effect on the class-struggle. It corresponds to a bygone age, that of the ‘bourgeois romanticism’ of the revolutions of the nineteenth century, where some leaders thought that they could mobilise the ‘passive masses’ by providing the ‘spark’ for the social explosion. The proletarian revolution, by contrast, ‘has nothing in common with the explosion of a powder-keg’. Finally, terrorist-action can only confuse the workers’ class-consciousness: it reduces them to passivity. Individual action becomes a substitute for mass-action. Its effect is thus totally negative: ‘Even if such an act hit and effectively weakened the bourgeoisie, the only consequence would be to develop among the workers the conviction that such personal acts could liberate them ... which would drive them still further from autonomous action as a class.’<sup>97</sup>

Consequently, the proletarian movement must reject all forms of terrorist-action, which is nothing other than a revival of nihilism from the end of the

93 GIC leaflet, in *Spartacus*, No. 19, 9 March 1933.

94 Pannekoek, *PIC* No. 7, March 1933. Pannekoek’s text on Van der Lubbe was published in 1983 by Comsopolis of Leiden.

95 Ibid.

96 Ibid.

97 Ibid.

nineteenth century. The GIC and Pannekoek thus showed clearly that the future of the revolutionary movement could only lie in mass-action. This vision was not always understood by some militants of the Dutch councilist movement.<sup>98</sup>

After February 1933, the GIC in practice assumed the leadership of the international council-communist movement. The German groups, reduced to the strictest clandestinity, entrusted the publication of the international review *Proletarier* to Amsterdam, as the expression of the whole movement. There was only one issue. *Proletarier* was succeeded by the German-language theoretical review *Räte-Korrespondenz* from 1934–7.

During the 1930s, this was one of the few organs – like *Bilan* for the Italian communist left and *International Council Correspondence* in the USA – that tried to draw up an assessment of the ‘long night of the counter-revolution’ that fell on the entire revolutionary workers’ movement after 1933.

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98 During the 1930s, some individuals like Frits Kief took part in individual actions of ‘expropriation’, and were arrested. See: AA. VV. 1984, pp. 197–8.

## Towards a New Workers' Movement? The Record of Council-Communism (1933–5)

### 1 German Council-Communism after 1933 – Its Relationship with the GIC – Definition of the 'Councilist' Current

With the German council-communist groups plunged into total clandestinity, the GIC shouldered an increased political responsibility. The whole German movement depended on its political clarity and its organisational strength. International work regarding Germany was taken on jointly by the GIC and the Danish GIK. This joint work was not without difficulty and friction.<sup>1</sup> If it was to be effective, it required the centralisation and regroupment of existing forces. This would only be possible if the GIC rejected its conception of 'working-groups'. At the same time, without the necessary political homogeneity within the international council-communist movement, it was never really possible for the GIC to work towards this regroupment. And without this, the GIC ran the risk of theorising its isolation.

The GIC embarked upon the work of regroupment in March 1933. It not only published *Proletarier*, the international review of council-communism, but also ran a German press-service – *Pressedienst der Internationalen Kommunisten* (*PIK*) – which replaced the *INO* from Frankfurt and aimed to reflect the position of the German groups.<sup>2</sup> Due to the lack of homogeneity between

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- 1 Harald Andersen-Harild (1906–1980) went to Germany for a few weeks in 1933 in order to set up the clandestine links between Germany and Denmark. Friction between him and one former leader of the opposition in the KAPD and founding member of the KAU, Ernst Lincke (*alias* Kurt Lange), a refugee building-worker in Copenhagen, had disastrous results. Harald Andersen-Harild 'bombarded' the council-communist groups in the Netherlands, USA and even Germany with letters demanding that Ernst Lincke leave Sweden. A letter by the GIC, dated 20 August 1936, stressed that sending personal letters to the German comrades contained the risk that they would very quickly be sent to the concentration-camps. The GIC thus demanded that Andersen-Harild cease all written contact with the Berlin centre (see Archives ABA, Copenhagen, which contains Andersen-Harild's papers and also papers belonging to Jan Appel, Ernst Schneider, Johannes Onasch, and so on).
  - 2 *Proletarier*, which only had one issue; it was a 'review for the theory and practice of council-communism'. Not to be confused with the KAPD's *Proletarier*, the last issue of which appeared in February 1933. The *PIK* published by the GIC in 1933 only had five issues.

them and the Dutch, the *PIK* was soon replaced by *Rätekorrespondenz*, which sought to be a 'theoretical and discussion'-organ of the 'councils-movement' in its widest sense. It was thus more an organ for liaison than an organ for political orientation of the various international groups.

In contrast to the 1920s period, when the Dutch left had been an organisational appendage of the German movement, while still remaining the latter's theoretical head, the German left now became an 'annex' to the Dutch council-communist movement, at least on the organisational level, since the divergences within the very decentralised international movement were real but did not concern basic principles (see below).

Under the Nazi dictatorship, the German movement was reorganised underground, and was by no means swept away by the pitiless repression that descended on the workers' movement.<sup>3</sup> When a member of the GIC travelled to Germany in the summer to renew contacts, he found that the *Union*-movement had not been hit too hard by repression, and that the KAU was still intact, to the point of being able to hold three conferences. These led to a fusion between the KAU and the KAPD. But the divergences on the question of the party were too deep for the new organisation to have a solid basis. In December 1933, the new 'unified' organisation was shaken by intense factional struggles. The ex-members of the KAPD resolutely rejected the slogan of 'going to the masses' and advocated an activity corresponding to a period of counter-revolution, limited to strictly clandestine work. It was no longer a question of 'going to the masses' but of maintaining the cadres of the party: creating cells of three people and training up 'professional revolutionaries' on the Bolshevik model. There were other, no-less important differences. The ex-members of the KAPD rejected any 'united front from below' with the left-socialists like Willy Brandt's SAP, even in clandestinity, in the name of a common struggle 'against fascist repression'.<sup>4</sup>

3 The history of the German groups between 1933 and 1935 can be found in *Räte-Korrespondenz*, No. 16/17, May 1936: 'Differenzen in der Rätebewegung'. Some militants of the KAU/KAP were not only interned in Nazi *lagers* and tortured by the Gestapo, but also murdered by the SA and SS, like the young Paul Voss (1916–1934), a friend of Weiland. See M. Kubina 2001, p. 119.

4 Only the *Rote Kämpfer* had episodic clandestine contacts with the SAP. The group led by Heinz Langerhans (1904–76) – a friend of Karl Korsch and militant of *Kommunistische Politik* from 1927, returning to the SPD in 1932 – had contacts with all the oppositionist circles (KPD, SPD, KAPD, KAU, RK, SAPD), and from 1933 published the clandestine review *Proletarische Pressekorrespondenz* and the theoretical review *Die Initiative*. Langerhans was interned in a Nazi *lager* from 1933 to 1939, but in 1939 was able to emigrate via Belgium to the United States, where he worked in the milieu around Adorno and Horkheimer. See 'Über Karl Korsch', in *Jahrbuch* 1, 1973, pp. 267–91.

In this sense, the KAU locally had succumbed to the temptation of the 'anti-fascist united front'.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, the 'KAPDist' fraction rejected any idea of fusion with the *Rote Kämpfer* group of Schwab, Schröder, Goldstein and Reichenbach, even though the latter had broken organisationally with the 'left-socialism' of the SAP.<sup>6</sup> The new organisation thus broke up in the summer of 1934. The antagonistic fractions mutually excluded each other. The result was a new organisation, the 'Revolutionary Shop-Stewards' (*Revolutionäre Obleute*), which was in continuity with the KAU. It was this group that built links

5 This happened, for example, in Mönchengladbach, where the circle formed in 1934 by members of the Brandlerian KPD and of the KAU was dismantled by the Gestapo in 1936. In Aachen, an *Antifa-Komitee* was formed with the SPD, KPD, *Leninbund*, Korsch's group, the Unionist elements of the KAU and the anarcho-syndicalist FAUD. See Theissen, Walter and Wilhelms 1980, pp. 77 and 133.

6 Ihlau 1971. Even before 1933, the KAPD had condemned the 'centrism' of the Schröder-Reichenbach group, which recruited its 'cadres' from the Social Democracy. It thus concluded that 'it could have nothing to do with the RK group which is still inside the SPD': 'Einheitsfront und Einheitsfrontstaktik', *KAZ* (Berlin), No. 7, July 1932. As for the *Rote Kämpfer*, they judged the KAPD and the KAU to be the 'ruins of the historic decline' of the *Union*-movement. They also rejected the 'activism' and Unionist 'semi-syndicalism' of the KAU: see *RK Korrespondenz*, 14 February and 16 August 1932.

The basis of the RK was the *Sozialwissenschaftliche Vereinigung* (swv). This was – from 1924 – a loose aggregation of young socialists interested in theoretical and political discussions on the problems of socialism and held together by monthly meetings and weekend-seminars. Speakers at the meetings included several of the most prominent figures from all the left-organisations (sometimes including Rühle). The meetings were attended mostly by oppositional members of the SPD, but also by other veterans of the KAPD and the AAU. By 1928, the swv organised around 800 members in Berlin. In 1929 Karl Schröder came to the conclusion that the crisis of capitalism and general political developments would lead to a period of dictatorship and illegality for revolutionary workers and communists. They therefore started to build up a nucleus within the swv, a structured organisation later to be known as *Rote Kämpfer*. Many former members of the KAPD and AAU were recruited to the SPD, especially its youth-organisations, where they participated in the debates and supported the left-oppositional currents with the perspective of mass-clarification and further recruitment for the RK-network. Over 1930–32, the Schröder-Schwab-Reichenbach-Goldstein group fully took over both the swv and the bulletin *Der Rote Kämpfer*, which was originally set up by a local SPD oppositional group in the Ruhr-area (Freital/Gittersee). The RK were study- and discussion-circles, publishing some material, and acting in the strictest clandestinity even before 1933. They had around 400 members, a considerable number given the extremely effective repression by the Gestapo. It was purely by chance in 1936 that the Gestapo discovered the RK's activities. As a result, 150 members of the RK were arrested and given heavy prison-sentences. These included Karl Schröder, Peter Utzelmann, and Alexander Schwab, who died in prison in 1942.

with the Dutch GIC and with Paul Mattick's council-communist organisation in the USA.<sup>7</sup>

The evolution of the Dutch GIC towards a fully-fledged kind of 'councilism' can only be explained in the German and international context. The opening up of a counter-revolutionary period leading inevitably towards world-war was theorised by the GIC. The collapse of the German workers' movement in 1933 led the GIC to proclaim the bankruptcy of the organisational conceptions of what it called the 'old workers' movement'. In its place, a 'new workers' movement' had to arise, composed of small working-groups, whose task was purely propagandistic (see below). Through fear of taking an 'authoritarian' and substitutionist vision of the party, which it believed led straight to the conception of a single-party state, the GIC rejected any idea of a centralised international organisation. Viewing Bolshevism and Stalinism with the same opprobrium, seeing the second as the logical successor of the first, the GIC was led to reject the Russian experience after October 1917. Sliding from 'anti-Leninism' to 'anti-Bolshevism', the GIC adopted the theses of Otto Rühle.<sup>8</sup> Only the constant reference to the German council-movement prevented the GIC from slipping into a 'classical' anarchist vision. Nevertheless, in its basic principles, the GIC remained Marxist and refused to follow the politics of anarchist groups, whose theory and practice it condemned. In the general milieu around the GIC, however, other groups evolved more logically towards anarchism.<sup>9</sup>

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7 From March 1933, the KAU published its bulletin *Zur Information*. To deceive the Gestapo, the title often changed: *Neue Rundschau*, *Arbeiterbrief*, *Brief an Arbeiter*, *Spiegel des Faschismus* ('Mirror on fascism'). They were published in clandestine print-shops, including that of the illegal Proletarian Freethinkers' Association (*Gemeinschaft proletarischer Freidenker* – GpF) in Berlin-Neukölln. These issues can be found in the ABA in Copenhagen, in the Andersen-Harild archives. Significantly, in the June 1933 issue of *Arbeiterbrief* the KAU argued that the task was to 'sweep away the ruins of reformism, to help give birth to the revolutionary front of the proletarian mass-struggle'. It was a question of creating 'communist cadres who act as the spores of the proletarian movement' through the setting-up of 'new circles' and 'an educational work, which will anchor communist ideology ever more deeply in the proletariat'. Unlike the remnants of the KAPD, it took a position 'against the renaissance of Bolshevism'.

8 *Programm der KAPD*: 'The Russian Revolution was the first flame of the world-revolution ... The most important task of the Third International was to spread the fire to the capitalist edifice in Europe with real and heroic courage: our Russian brothers have resisted the attacks of all the counter-revolutionary armies. Despite the Civil War, the blockade, the scarcity of industrial products and means of communication, they made an attempt to reconstruct the economy in a communist direction' (KAPD 1923b, p. 25).

9 Such as the *Discussie* group, which came out of the GIC in 1935.



There is no doubt that the objective situation of the German council-communist organisations, cut-off from each other and reduced to small discussion-groups under the pressure of clandestinity, had a profound influence on the 'councilist' evolution of the GIC. In its conception of a 'new movement' and in its practise, the GIC was already theorising a situation forced on the movement by circumstances. On the other hand, the Dutch communists' 'anti-Bolshevik' theses came directly out of a fraction of German council-communism, the *Rote Kämpfer*, which saw Bolshevism as being responsible for the triumph of the Stalinist and Hitlerite counter-revolution. It is, perhaps, not irrelevant to point out that the *Theses on Bolshevism*, adopted in 1934 by the GIC (see below), were written in 1932 by a current closer to left-socialism than to the KAPD.

The GIC's theses, in turn, had the effect of creating much confusion in the German milieu. The refusal to accept any international regroupment and any international council-communist platform condemned the German and Dutch groups to international isolation, and this was the cause of their ultimate atomisation and disintegration. At the same time, the GIC limited itself more and more to the Dutch context.

Nevertheless, during the 1930s the GIC was able to sustain itself as a genuine revolutionary-Marxist current. Its political and theoretical contributions on decisive questions such as anti-fascism, state-capitalism and war are part of the common 'heritage' of the international communist left of that time.

The 'councilist' theory developed in the various groups that had emerged from – or still referred to – the German communist left was a theorisation of the most profound defeat suffered by the international proletariat, as embodied in the victory of Stalinism and Nazism, although its seeds were already contained in Rühle's writings in the 1920s.<sup>10</sup>

Its influence on the German and Dutch revolutionary movement was held in check by the existence of the KAPD, which defended the necessity of the party. The KAPD never rejected the 1917–20 Russian experience, despite its criticisms of Bolshevik and Leninist policies. The final disappearance of the KAPD in 1933 and the isolation in clandestinity of what remained of the German communist left, left the field open to the 'councilist' current.

'Councilism' does not simply mean advocating the workers' councils as organs of the dictatorship of the proletariat after the destruction of the old bourgeois state. It expresses a workerist vision that sees the existence of revolutionary political parties within the workers' councils as a negative factor. This negative conception of the revolutionary party considers that the workers' councils

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10 Rühle 1974.

are the one and only crucible of revolutionary consciousness within the working class. In line with Rühle's 'anti-authoritarian' conception, any party, even a revolutionary one, is bourgeois in essence and aims at the seizure of power by a group of intellectuals in the place of the revolutionary proletariat.<sup>11</sup>

In the second place, 'councilism' is a negative reaction of revolutionary groups to the experience of the Russian Revolution. This was rejected as a 'bourgeois revolution', whose main social force was the peasantry and which could only end up in state-capitalism. The rejection of the Russian Revolution led to a retrospective identification between the Bolshevism of 1917 and the Stalinism of 1927. By seeing nothing in the Russian Revolution except its ultimate degeneration, 'councilism' assimilated any workers' revolution led by one or more revolutionary parties with a 'bourgeois revolution' substituting itself for the power of the workers' councils.

In the third place, 'councilist' theory, under the terrible shock of seeing the German proletariat defeated without a fight in 1933, considered that the organisational structures of what it called 'the old workers' movement', both in their function and their way of operating, were definitively dead. The whole past experience of the nineteenth-century workers' movement was rejected as negative. The threat of fascism and the imminent danger of war, by forcing most revolutionary groups into clandestinity, led the councilist groups to theorise the existence of small clandestine groupings, discussion-groups or working-groups as the form of the 'new workers' movement'.

Finally, councilism was an 'economistic' theory. Considering that the class-struggle of the proletariat was essentially economic, it saw the revolutionary process as a question of the form of the economic management of the proletariat, in strike-committees, unemployed-committees and workers' councils. The primordial issue of the revolution was the proletariat's domination over the productive forces. For councilism, the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' was economic, rather than political.

However, the fully-fledged councilist theory elaborated in the 1930s was not imposed on the international council-communist movement without hesitation and reservations.

The adoption of the 'councilist' vision encountered much resistance, both in the German movement and the GIC itself. In this sense, the GIC was not a 'pure' councilist group.

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11 'A party that is revolutionary in the proletarian sense is a nonsense. It can only have a revolutionary character in the bourgeois sense, and here only at the historic turning-point between feudalism and capitalism.' Rühle 1974, p. 32.

## 2 The Adoption of the *Theses on Bolshevism* (1934)

In 1932–3 a member of the *Rote Kämpfer*, Helmut Wagner (probably together with Karl Schröder), wrote the *Theses on Bolshevism*, which were to become the theory of the international council-communist movement. Re-worked collectively by the GIC, they were translated into German and English and adopted by the whole 'councilist' movement.<sup>12</sup> They provoked little discussion or criticism. To this day, they have provided the theoretical basis for councilist groups all over the world, especially since 1968.<sup>13</sup> These theses are an explicit rejection of the proletarian experience of the Russian Revolution.

### 2.1 The 'Bourgeois' Nature of Bolshevism

Unlike all the left-groups who quit the Comintern to draw a critical assessment of the Bolsheviks' actions, the council-communists rejected any real analysis of the events of 1917 and the policies of Bolshevism before Kronstadt. According to the council-communists, there was no discontinuity between the Bolshevik party of 1917 and the Stalinist counter-revolution which liquidated it, between Lenin and Stalin. The counter-revolution began when the Bolshevik party took power in October 1917, substituting itself for the workers' councils.

According to the GIC and the other 'councilist' groups, the Bolshevik party was not the most 'radical' party in the workers' councils, but an organisation 'alien' to the proletariat. The GIC considered Bolshevism as an expression of other social strata; they saw it as 'petty-bourgeois', the 'leading party of the revolutionary petty-bourgeois intelligentsia in Russia'. This stratum, like the Jacobin petty bourgeoisie in the French Revolution, aimed only at overthrowing 'feudalism' and setting up its own dictatorship over society. Its 'centralist' conception of organisation derived directly from Jacobinism, aiming at 'the creation of a rigid organisation of professional revolutionaries which would remain the obedient instrument of an omnipotent leadership'.

In the GIC's view, the Bolshevik party was not much different from the Social-Revolutionary party, drawing its support from the Russian peasantry in order to carry through the 'anti-feudal revolution'. The essential difference was that

12 'Stellingen over het bolsjevisme', *PIC*, No. 5, April 1934; *Räte-Korrespondenz*, No. 3, August 1934; *International Council Correspondence*, No. 3, December 1934. A French translation is available: Korsch, Mattick, Pannekoek, Rühle and Wagner 1973, pp. 23–4.

13 Thus, the *Theses on Bolshevism* were particularly influential in the Scandinavian councilist movement in the 1970s. See the translation by the Swedish group *Internationell Arbetarkamp*: 'Teser om Bolsjevismen', *Internationell Arbetarkamp*, No. 3, Stockholm, 1973.

Bolshevism, though an expression of the intelligentsia and peasantry, was also able to win the backing of the proletariat: 'The historic task of Bolshevism was to weld together two opposing revolts, that of the proletariat and that of the peasantry, by assuming leadership and guiding them towards a common objective: the abolition of the feudal state'.

To explain the immense echo that the Bolsheviks had in the soviets, which rallied to their slogan 'All power to the soviets', the GIC and the 'councilist' groups were obliged to talk about Bolshevik 'Machiavellians'. The whole history of the Russian Revolution should be, in effect, reduced to a plot: 'The establishment of the Soviet state was the establishment of the rule of the party of Bolshevik Machiavellianism' (Thesis 57).

Thus, according to the GIC, the Bolshevik party had been aware of the need to deceive the Russian proletariat about the 'bourgeois' nature of the revolution and about the nature of the new power: the Bolshevik party's dictatorship over society. To achieve its ends, Bolshevism adopted a 'maximalist' tactic in order to gain the confidence of the revolutionary workers. All the actions of the Bolshevik party were basically tactical manoeuvres aimed at deceiving the proletariat. Thus, the slogan 'All power to the soviets' was 'launched by Lenin after the February Revolution with a tactical goal in view'. The same was true in October, since, according to the GIC, 'the soviets were simply an instrument that allowed the party to seize power' (Thesis 39). The October Revolution was just a *party-coup d'état* 'sealing the Jacobin conspiracy' (Thesis 45).

The same 'Bolshevik Machiavellianism' lay behind their internationalist position during the war and after October 1917:

During the First World-War, the Bolsheviks continually represented the internationalist position with the slogan 'turn the imperialist war into a civil war', and in appearance behaved like the most consistent Marxists. But this revolutionary internationalism was part of their tactic, just as the turn towards the NEP was later on. The appeal to the international proletariat was just one aspect of a whole policy aimed at winning international support for the Russian revolution.

Thesis 50

Thus, from the beginning, according to the GIC, the Bolsheviks' internationalism, which took concrete form in the foundation of the Comintern, was just a 'trick' dictated by power-politics. Bolshevism 'tricked' the workers of the whole world when it talked about world-revolution. Bolshevik internationalism calling for the overthrow of the bourgeoisie in all countries was, in fact, 'the peasant-internationalism of a bourgeois revolution carried out in the era of

world-imperialism' (Thesis 53). The goal was to position the Russian Bolshevik party 'at the head of a worldwide Bolshevik system in which the communist interests of the proletariat would be combined with the capitalist interests of the peasants' (Thesis 55). Finally, the national independence granted to the minorities of the former Russian Empire was another trick: it was not an application of the Bolshevik programme of 'the right of peoples to self-determination', contrary to the interests of the Russian state, but simply a use of 'the national instincts of the peasants and oppressed national minorities of the Russian Empire, with the aim of overthrowing Tsarism' (Thesis 53). Finally, the Bolsheviks fooled not only these 'national minorities' but also themselves, by sacrificing the very 'Russian national interests' they were supposed to represent in the framework of the 'Russian bourgeois revolution'.

Thus Bolshevism, which in 1917–20 had been hailed by the Dutch left, by Pannekoek and Gorter, as the most determined and radical element in the revolutionary movement, took on a very different colouring for the GIC of 1934. The *Theses* turned a proletarian current into a 'petty-bourgeois', 'bourgeois', 'peasant' or 'Jacobin' one.

The anti-Bolshevism of the GIC and the councilist currents led them to reject the Russian Revolution after October 1917. This was no longer seen as a proletarian revolution carried out by millions of workers, the prologue to the revolution in Western Europe, but a long-delayed 'bourgeois revolution', prolonging into the twentieth century the anti-feudal revolutions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Russia, which in 1914 was the fifth industrial power in the world, was assimilated to the France of 1789, where the feudal system still predominated: 'serfdom, in various forms, survived, in practice, for the immense majority of the Russian peasantry, and held back the development of the capitalist type of agriculture that was only in its early days' (Thesis 6). But given the substantial development of capitalist industry that had taken place, the GIC was obliged to consider Russia as a 'mixed' system, neither fully capitalist nor fully feudal: 'feudal-type agriculture and capitalist industry mutually impregnated each other with their essential elements and combined into a system which could not be governed according to the principles of the feudal system, nor develop along the capitalist road' (Thesis 6).

The consequence of this view was that the task of the revolution in Russia had not been to destroy the capitalist system, as in the other industrial powers, but to develop it: 'the economic task of the Russian Revolution was, first of all, to do away with feudal agriculture and the exploitation of the peasants through the system of serfdom by raising commodity-production to a more modern level; in the second place, to make possible the autonomous creation of a real class of 'free workers', by ridding industrial production of all feudal vestiges; in

other words, the task of Bolshevism was to carry out the bourgeois revolution' (Thesis 7).

It was not Bolshevism that engendered the 'Russian bourgeois revolution'; it was the other way round. For the GIC, the Bolshevik party represented the Hegelian *Zeitgeist* of an inevitable evolution towards the bourgeois revolution in any underdeveloped country: 'In its principles, tactics and organisation, Bolshevism was a movement and a method of the bourgeois revolution in a preponderantly peasant-country' (Thesis 66).

## 2.2 *The Significance of the Theses on Bolshevism*

The Russian Revolution was not the 'first step towards the world-revolution'. All the other revolutions, in Germany, Hungary, Austria, Italy, and so on, were, in the logic of the *Theses*, just the tail-end of the 'Russian bourgeois revolution'. Finally, the 'councilist' groups claimed that a proletarian revolution could not be on the agenda. They, whether more or less consciously, seemed to adopt the positions of Russian Menshevism in 1917.

Secondly, by trying at all costs to see the genesis of Stalinism in the Bolshevism of 1917, the council-communist groups seemed to deny the revolutionary nature of the left-wing of the Social Democracy, before and after 1914. It is perfectly evident that the left-groups – Bordiga's faction, Spartakism, Rosa Luxemburg's SDKPiL in Poland, the SPD of Gorter and Pannekoek, and so on – had the same positions as the Bolsheviks: against the war, for the revolution, the need for a Third International. From 1917 to 1921 all of them, without exception, supported the Russian Revolution, even if with criticisms, as the 'first step of the proletarian revolution'. Pannekoek and Gorter fought against Wijnkoop precisely because of his 'lukewarm' support for the October Revolution.

Thirdly, the theory of 'Bolshevik Machiavellianism', which reduced history to a series of plots and tactical manoeuvres by political parties, bore a curious similarity to Stalinism's 'police'-vision of history and ended up as a travesty of real historical events. It offers no explanation why the Russian Revolution – a 'bourgeois' one, according to the councilists – encountered such enthusiasm, such a revolutionary echo among the working masses of the industrialised countries, which had already achieved their bourgeois revolutions. It does not explain how and why the left-communists of the European countries were in solidarity with the Russian Revolution: unless one argues that the entire revolutionary movement of the day, which defended the same positions as the Bolsheviks, allowed itself to be utterly taken in, without any reaction against this.

Again, the *Theses on Bolshevism* do not explain the policies of the Bolshevik party, either the continuity or the dangers within them, nor the direction of

the Russian Revolution. If the party had been the bearer of a 'Russian bourgeois revolution', it is hard to understand the positions it took up in the Second International against reformism, revisionism and war. If it was no more than an 'anti-feudal' party, it would be hard to understand why it opposed currents such as the populists, the right-wing Social-Revolutionaries, the Mensheviks and others, all of whom were more-or-less partisans of support for the Russian liberal bourgeoisie; the same goes for its opposition to the Kerensky government, which, on the pretext of fighting a national revolutionary war, wanted to continue the imperialist war; similarly, its action in favour of destroying the new bourgeois state set up in February 1917, through the seizure of power by the workers' councils. If Bolshevism had expressed the need for a national bourgeois revolution, it would not have proclaimed the need for a world-revolution, which is, by definition, anti-national; it would not have advocated Lenin's 'revolutionary defeatism', which was the negation of Russian national interests. If 'tactical' internationalism had been the best card of the Russian bourgeoisie in its bid for power, it is difficult to see why it made no use of it.

Finally, it was hard to explain why a 'Jacobin' current would have facilitated, through the formation of the Comintern, workers' insurrections in Europe that, had they been successful, would have given birth to republics of workers' councils that would, by definition, have been hostile to the national interests of a bourgeois revolution. Unless, of course, you argue that, for the first time in history, there could be a state-capitalist International, raised above particular national interests, and, in a paradoxical manner, attacking the bourgeoisie itself in order to establish the power of the 'intelligentsia'. But how, then, would you explain the fact that this 'intelligentsia' was insignificant in the Communist Parties, which were largely composed of workers? How would you explain the hostility of the intellectuals, except for a tiny minority, to communism in 1920? The GIC had no answer to all these questions of simple historical logic.<sup>14</sup>

As for the policies carried out by the Bolshevik party after 1917 – land to the peasants, self-determination for the different nationalities, the running of the state and the gradual subordination of the councils to the state – it is important to note that, while all these policies were criticised by the Dutch and German lefts, it was not because they saw them as a transition towards the behaviour of the 'bourgeois revolution'. What these lefts did criticise was the successive 'tactical errors' of the Bolshevik party after 1917, linking them either

14 The GIC, in order to justify its thesis as to the historic role of the intelligentsia in the Russian Revolution, asserted that unlike the petty-bourgeoisie, the 'intellectuals' formed an 'ascendant' social stratum, the bearer of 'state-socialism'. See 'Die Intelligenz im Klassenkampf', *Räte-Korrespondenz*, No. 3, September 1934.

to the 'immaturity of the international proletariat' or to the 'dramatic isolation of the Russian Revolution'. Indeed they approved a number of measures or slogans they later perceived as fatal to the course of the revolution. While they were hostile to the slogan 'land to the peasants', they did not really criticise the fact of a workers' party establishing itself at the head of the state by gradually substituting itself for the powers of the workers' councils.<sup>15</sup> The Dutch communist left had the same positions as the Bolsheviks on the national question, in that it called not for workers' revolution in the Dutch East Indies, but for the 'national independence' of the colonies. As for the economic measures of the 'war-communism' period, they were greeted with some enthusiasm by these same lefts.

The *Theses on Bolshevism* seemed, in fact, to be the expression of the profound disappointment, even demoralisation, experienced by these groups in the face of a revolution that had turned into its opposite. Not wanting to recognise that a revolution could turn into a counter-revolution in an isolated country, after the failure of an international revolutionary wave, the GIC denied the very existence of a proletarian revolution in the Russia of 1917. For them, there was no workers' revolution and no counter-revolution. There had been a 'bourgeois revolution' and Stalin was its direct and final incarnation, in a 'Thermidorian' manner, on the model of the French Revolution.<sup>16</sup> According to the GIC, this Thermidor – which did away with the attempts at workers' management of the factories and the experience of war-communism by replacing them with state-capitalism – had, in any case, begun before Stalin, under Lenin and Trotsky.<sup>17</sup> For example, the GIC refused to consider the Kronstadt uprising as a crime that pulled the leaders of October and their party in a counter-revolutionary direction through the use of systematic violence within the proletariat. The Stalinist terror, culminating in 1934–8, was placed on the

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15 The idea that the party should take power appeared in the Spartakist programme, written by Rosa Luxemburg in December 1918: 'If Spartacus takes power it will only be through the clear and indisputable will of the great majority of the proletarian masses'.

16 Although the GIC never uses the term 'Thermidor' to analyse the evolution of the internal situation under Lenin and Stalin, there are certain points of contact with Trotsky's theory. The analogy with the Thermidor of the French Revolution did not contradict the idea that the Russian Revolution, like that of 1789, was a 'bourgeois' revolution. But whereas the French Thermidor marked the stabilisation of the bourgeois revolution, Leninism and Stalinism signified the definitive end of the revolutionary dynamic in Russia and the installation of a state-capitalist system of exploitation.

17 The GIC's *Grundprinzipien* showed a certain fascination for the experience of war-communism between 1918 and 1920.



same level as Kronstadt in 1921. For the GIC, 'Bolshevism' perpetuated itself under Stalin; it was the same Bolshevik party as in January 1918. Far from seeing Trotsky, Zinoviev, Bukharin and Kamenev as victims of a process in which they acted blindly, these figures were placed in the camp of the hangmen, in 1920 as in 1934–8: 'The Kronstadt workers were massacred on the orders of Lenin and Trotsky because their demands went against the interests of the Bolshevik state of 1920. For us it matters little whether executions are ordered by Stalin or Trotsky ...'<sup>18</sup>

It is remarkable, however, that the GIC saw the 16 Old Bolsheviks shot by Stalin as the 'heroes of October' and considered the 'communist groups in the Russian sense of the term' to be on the same level as the Kronstadt rebels.<sup>19</sup>

On this point, as on many others, the GIC was full of contradictions; it hesitated to accept all the political implications of the *Theses on Bolshevism*.

### 2.3 *The Contradictions of the GIC*

It is symptomatic that, despite everything, the Russian Revolution remained a revolutionary reference-point for the GIC. Two years after the publication of the *Theses*, Pannekoek underlined the worldwide significance of the Russian Revolution:

Like a dazzling meteor, the Russian Revolution illuminated the Earth. But the workers needed another kind of revolution. After filling them with such hope and energy, the dazzling light of the Russian Revolution blinded the workers, so that they could no longer see what route to take.<sup>20</sup>

Showing its contradictions, the GIC republished the *Grundprinzipien* in Dutch in the 1930s. Here, it was asserted that 'Russia had, as far as industry was concerned, set up an economic system along communist principles' in 1920.<sup>21</sup> In fact, the GIC had not completely abandoned the old conception held by the Dutch and German lefts of a 'dual revolution', part-bourgeois, part-proletarian. In November 1936, the following phrase appeared: 'The revolution of 1917 remained a bourgeois revolution. Its proletarian elements were beaten'. It was also stated that the Russian revolution became completely capitalist after 1931:

18 *Räte-Korrespondenz*, No. 20, December 1936; *PIG*, No. 18, November 1936, 'Het tegenwoordige Rusland'; *ICC*, No. 2, February 1937.

19 *Ibid.*

20 John Harper, 'On the communist party', *International Council Correspondence*, Vol. 11, No. 7, June 1936, pp. 11–12.

21 Appel 1970, p. 11.

'... it became capitalist with the abolition of the last freely elected workers' councils. From 1931, the Russian economy rid itself of all elements foreign to its capitalist structure'. And the GIC concluded by affirming the need for a new October 1917 in Russia: 'The day will come when Russia, once again, as in the heroic days of October, but more powerfully, will again hear the war-cry "*All power to the soviets*".'<sup>22</sup>

In practice, particularly with the events in Spain, the GIC was still a long way from rejecting the Russian Revolution and the Bolshevik party as 'bourgeois'. Both remained a 'revolutionary reference-point'.<sup>23</sup>

### 3 Towards a New Workers' Movement? – The Theses of the GIC (1935)

Like the *Theses on Bolshevism*, the theses *Towards a new workers' movement* were the culmination of the GIC's entire development from 1927 onwards. Written by Henk Canne Meijer in 1935, and translated into several languages, they provoked some very lively debates in the international council-communist movement.<sup>24</sup> They were basically a theorisation of the defeat of the world-proletariat marked by Hitler's arrival in power. By proclaiming the bankruptcy of all past organisations, including revolutionary organisations, and by rejecting the need to form centralised political parties and the possibility of a new International – or, rather, of an international regroupment of council-communist organisations – the GIC's theses made no small contribution to the disintegration of the 'councilist' movement after 1935. The Copenhagen Conference of 1935 was a decisive stage in this process of disintegration.

#### 3.1 A Theory of Defeat

Canne Meijer's text was, in the first place, an acknowledgement that the workers' movement had been crushed: from Germany in 1933 to the Asturias Insurrection and the unemployed workers' movement in Amsterdam in 1934. Capitalism had greatly strengthened itself politically 'through development towards fascism and National Socialism' and 'the end of the democratic development of society' that had characterised the nineteenth century. The consequence of

<sup>22</sup> Quotations from *PIC*, No. 18, November 1936.

<sup>23</sup> See Chapter Nine on the response of the Dutch internationalist communists to the events in Spain.

<sup>24</sup> 'Naar een nieuwe arbeidersbeweging', *PIC*, Nos. 4 and 5, April and May 1935; *Räte-Korrespondenz*, No. 8/9, April/May 1935; *ICC*, No. 11, August 1935. Reprinted in German: *Gruppe Internationaler Kommunisten Holland* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1971), pp. 139–67.

this was that the open dictatorship of the bourgeoisie 'had left the workers with a feeling of powerlessness'. But this powerlessness was not simply the result of the 'strengthened deployment of forces by the bourgeoisie'; rather, it was the product of the eradication of the workers' class-consciousness. The workers were bogged down in corporatism, which led to inevitable defeats: 'The cause of these defeats resides in the fact that a professional category is far too weak to bring down capitalism ... Workers feel more connected to a professional group than to the class in general'. This powerlessness was also the fruit of the workers' conservative attachment to the old workers' movement, to the unions and to the political parties, which had been a valid form for the development of class-consciousness in the struggle for democratic rights and social improvements in the nineteenth century, but were no longer valid in the twentieth century. Thus, the old workers' movement, to use Gorter's expression, resembled 'a paper-sword brandished against an iron-shield'.

This diagnosis was not unique to Canne Meijer and the GIC. From the 1920s, it was shared by most revolutionary groups.<sup>25</sup> What was new in the GIC's theses was the assertion that the narrowing of workers' consciousness, of the immediate level of consciousness in the class, had been concretised in a regression of class-consciousness. The latter, as a theoretical and political consciousness of revolutionary goals, no longer existed, because of the absence of class-struggle. This idea was strikingly close to the one simultaneously adopted by part of the Italian communist left:

... [I]n reality, the working class is saying nothing, doing nothing, adopting no point of view. It does not exist as an active class. It exists passively like any dead thing. As a living entity it only exists when it enters into movement and becomes conscious of itself.<sup>26</sup>

It followed from this that the proletariat, as at the time of its birth at the beginning of the nineteenth century, was no more than a mere economic category, still unaware of its destiny. The defeat meant a 'regression from a class *for* itself,

25 Thus, for example, the Italian communist left around the periodical *Bilan*; but also other groups like Chazé's *Union Communiste* in France, which published *L'Internationale*, and Hennaut's LCI in Belgium.

26 Thus the Bordigist group '*Bilan*' wrote: 'Temporarily, the proletariat does not exist as a class, as the result of profound world-wide defeats' (Jacobs, 'L'écrasement du prolétariat français et ses enseignements internationaux', *Bilan*, No. 29, March–April 1936). During the Second World-War, Vercesi (pseudonym of Ottorino Perrone [1897–1957]) defended the idea of the 'social disappearance of the proletariat' (See Bourrinet 1999).

to a class *in* itself'. For sure, Canne Meijer added that in the future the proletariat would not be starting again from square one, as at the very beginning of the workers' movement; he noted that 'each mass-movement develops again on the basis of the experience of previous movements'. Furthermore, each defeat for the workers was partial and expressed an immaturity of consciousness: 'Such a defeat, combined with a temporary impotence, is also an expression of growing strength: it is the defeat of a young giant whose strength has not yet sufficiently matured'. However, such an analysis was contradictory. It was difficult to admit that a 'dead thing' could at the same time become more and more conscious of itself without recognising a subterranean maturation of consciousness, actively preparing future mass-movements.

This conception of the defeat of the proletariat, whereby the class was reduced to a state of absolute passivity, was far from sound historically. Could workers' actions like the 1934 uprisings in Vienna and Asturias, or the French strikes of May–June 1936, be interpreted as signs of total passivity? On the other hand, were the workers not becoming more and more actively mobilised for anti-fascism, the popular fronts, and the idea of a war? In which case, the proletariat was not 'passive': it was adhering 'actively' to anti-revolutionary ideologies. This point was underlined by Helmut Wagner, who rejected the ambiguous theory of 'passivity':

As ever, the workers are absolutely active in the social movement. This activity constitutes a definite element in capitalist reality, even if it is heading in a conservative direction. A class that is passive from the revolutionary point of view is not a 'dead thing'. First, its activity is only relatively passive; and second, it goes in a direction that does not lead consciously to the communist struggle.<sup>27</sup>

Furthermore, as Mattick pointed out, it was wrong to counterpose a class *in* itself to a class *for* itself: from its birth, the proletariat was already a conscious class, a class *for* itself. Class-consciousness could not just disappear: 'The class at every stage is both a class in itself and a class for itself: it simply expresses itself in a different way in different situations and at different levels of development'.<sup>28</sup>

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27 'Diskussionsbeitrag', *Räte-Korrespondenz*, No. 10/11, July–August 1935; *PIC*, No. 1, January 1936; *ICC*, No. 12, October 1935.

28 'Probleme der neuen Arbeiterbewegung', *International Council Correspondence*, No. 2, January 1936; *PIC*, No. 2, February 1936; *Räte-Korrespondenz*, No. 15, March 1936.

The contradictions of the GIC on class-consciousness, expressed by Canne Meijer, help to explain its conception of organisation – both the general organisation of the class, and, in particular, the organisation of the revolutionary minority.

### 3.2 *The 'New Workers' Movement' and the 'Working-Groups'*

Canne Meijer's essential thesis was that an elaborated theoretical and political class-consciousness could no longer be developed and 'crystallised' in structured political organisations and parties whose aim was to 'lead' the proletariat's action, thus depriving the class of its autonomy and spontaneity. The bankruptcy of the Social-Democratic and Communist parties in 1933 was seen as the bankruptcy of any revolutionary group or party. Even if they were new, even if they were to the left of the CPS, they represented the obsolete conceptions of the 'old workers' movement', according to which the party always had to impose itself as the 'general staff' of the working class: 'All organisations that claim for themselves the task of leading the struggle, that aim to become the "general staff" of the working class, are on the other side, even if their date of birth is still recent'.<sup>29</sup>

Thus, for the GIC, it was not just the old parties who were on the other side of the barricade, but the new ones as well. The 'substitutionism' of these new organisations was a class-frontier dividing the old from the 'new' workers' movement: '... we consider all those organisations who do not want to usurp power, but who elevate to a principle the self-movement of the masses through the workers' councils, as an integral part of the new workers' movement'.<sup>30</sup> Logically, this meant putting the Trotskyist and 'Bordigist' organisations on 'the side of the enemy', without considering their political and programmatic positions.<sup>31</sup> Anti-substitutionism was the real political foundation of the 'new

29 'Das Werden einer neuen Arbeiterbewegung', *Räte-Korrespondenz*, No. 8/9, April 1935.

30 Ibid.

31 This GIC position did not prevent them from having political relations with the 'Bordigist' Italian and Belgian lefts, and even participating in the 1937 Paris Conference alongside Trotskyist-type groups (see Chapter Nine). In the Netherlands, the GIC maintained links with Sneeveliet's semi-Trotskyist RSAP and with the NAS union, even encouraging joint work with them. On 30 April 1939, for example, there was a joint meeting in Amsterdam between the two organisations, aimed at setting up 'action-committees' against 'war and fascism'. While rejecting the organisational cartels ('unitary committees'), the GIC was for temporary 'action-committees', on condition that 'none of the organisations is held responsible for the action of the committee as a whole'. This attempt to form an 'action-committee' ultimately failed – according to the GIC – because of 'organisational sectarianism' ('Mislukte samenwerking', *PIC*, No. 4, June 1938).

workers' movement', which had to base itself on 'the idea of the councils' if it was to avoid repeating the failure of the Russian Revolution.

In fact, the 'new workers' movement' was the fruit of the new period of defeat, dominated by fascist totalitarianism. Reduced to clandestine activity, this councilist movement was condemned to exist in the form of dispersed underground-groups: 'This new workers' movement is already present, but still in its early days, to the point where you can hardly talk about a developed organisational structure. For the moment, it is taking the form of small, illegal propaganda-groups, which arise here and there and have different opinions on all sorts of political and theoretical issues ...'<sup>32</sup>

In fact, the GIC was theorising the reality of the German communist movement, where the groups coming out of the KAPD and KAU had transformed themselves into sealed-off discussion-groups in order to avoid repression by the Gestapo. This reality would, they thought, eventually apply to all countries through the 'fascistisation' of the old democratic countries, a process strengthened by the failure of all the groups and parties of the 'old workers' movement':

In Germany, for example, what has emerged from the ruins of the old workers' movement are small, illegal discussion-groups through which the workers seek to move towards new relations: in the present situation, an autonomous workers' movement is only possible in the form of such discussion-groups. And what has become the reality in Germany will also happen in other capitalist countries in the near future. Even in the latter, the time has come – with the obvious collapse of the old workers' movement – for the new form of discussion- and propaganda-groups, or, as we prefer to call them, the working-groups.<sup>33</sup>

It remained to be seen whether these discussion-groups were circumstantial, in a period of the clandestine rebirth of the revolutionary movement, or else its definitive form.

### 3.3 *The 'Working-Groups' and the Revolutionary Party*

The GIC's theory of 'working-groups' contained a number of ambiguities and confusions, which were underlined by the German 'councilist' movement. By affirming in its texts that 'the workers' movement is henceforth the movement

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<sup>32</sup> 'Das Werden einer neuen Arbeiterbewegung', *Räte-Korrespondenz*, No. 8/9, April 1935.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

of the workers in struggle' the GIC ruled out the possibility of there being revolutionary groups which were distinct, though not separate, from the proletariat as a whole.<sup>34</sup> The only thing that could emerge were 'workers' groups', composed only of workers and not distinct from the proletariat as a whole.

In fact, the definition of these groups remained rather vague. Sometimes they were 'discussion-groups', sometimes 'propaganda-groups', and sometimes 'opinion-groups'. Sometimes they were not even groups, but study-clubs.<sup>35</sup> It was a return to the old nineteenth-century movement, to the phase of workers' circles prior to the formation of the big, centralised political organisations with a coherent political programme. These circles were 'clubs' where workers could meet informally.

This return to the form of circles and clubs, which had been a primitive and provisional form of the nascent workers' movement, was seen as all-important by the GIC. Out of its reaction to what it called 'Bolshevism', but also out of a gut distrust of the Trotskyist movement, which was trying to build a revolutionary party in an unfavourable, counter-revolutionary period, the GIC rejected any possibility of these circles and groups joining in a centralised, programmatically elaborated unity that would play the part of a political vanguard. Like Rühle before them, the GIC saw 'the expression "revolutionary party" as a contradiction in terms'.<sup>36</sup> As Pannekoek put it, 'in the expression "revolutionary party", the term "revolutionary" means a bourgeois revolution'.<sup>37</sup> Thus, it was not a particular form of the party – the type that aimed to be the workers' general staff, to take power and exercise a party-dictatorship – but rather *any* form of party that was being condemned once and for all, including non-'substitutionist' ones. The GIC was against the formation of a party not because the council-communists were too few, too isolated from the indifferent and passive masses, to achieve some kind of unified party. It was because this party-form existed so as to impose a programme, slogans and a direction to the struggle. According to the GIC, a party could not be an active factor in the development of class-consciousness, it could only be a paralysing fetter on workers' action. This fear of 'violating' proletarian consciousness was expressed very clearly by Pannekoek:

The old workers' movement was embodied in parties, and today the belief in parties is the most powerful fetter on the working class's capacity for

34 See, among others: 'De strijdkomités der wilde stakingen', *PIC*, No. 1, February 1938, p. 4.

35 Pannekoek (anonymous), 'Praktisch werk', *PIC*, No. 2, February 1936.

36 Rühle 1974.

37 'Partei und Arbeiterklasse', *Räte-Korrespondenz*, No. 15, March 1936.

action. This is why we are not seeking to create a new one, and this is not because there are too few of us – any kind of party is small at first – but because, in our time, a party can only be an organisation that seeks to direct and dominate the proletariat ... The workers' task is not to religiously adopt the slogans of a particular group, not even our own, but to think for themselves, to decide and act for themselves.<sup>38</sup>

It followed from this that the GIC rejected the workers' movement's classical conception of a militant organisation exerting an active influence amongst the proletariat. The whole function of a revolutionary organisation was turned on its head.

### 3.4 *The Function and Functioning of the 'Working-Groups'*

From time to time, it still seemed that the word 'party' held no fear for the GIC or Pannekoek. In the text cited above, the latter had also said: 'Of course, if people with shared conceptions get together to discuss perspectives for activity, if they reach clarification through these discussions, if they make propaganda in favour of their ideas, you could, if you liked, give these groups the name of parties.'<sup>39</sup>

Here, Pannekoek gives the word 'party' the sense of partisans of a certain conception only to reject the centralised structure and militant function of these parties.<sup>40</sup> Whereas the revolutionary workers' movement since Marx had seen the party as a totality in its functions – clarification, militant intervention in the proletariat, organisational development – the council-communist groups presented themselves as an organic sum of juxtaposed functions.<sup>41</sup> Theoretical and practical functions were rigorously separated. The study-groups were devoted to the theoretical elaboration of a programme. The propaganda-groups – like *Proletenstemmen*, which was active amongst the unemployed – were specifically charged with intervention in the class-struggle. The 'working-groups' had organisational tasks: international contacts and putting out reviews. The result was a dispersion of complementary functions in separate and distinct groups that, in the last analysis, were autonomous: '... it is

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38 Ibid.

39 Ibid.

40 This definition of the party as a circle or group of people united by a shared conception can be found in the majority of today's 'Bordigist' groups. Each group, even if it is made up of only a few people, or is no more than a Marxological study-circle, sees itself as a 'party', if not the party.

41 See texts by Marx and Engels on the party: Dangeville (ed.) 1973.



necessary for every group to form an independent unit, so that it can think for itself and put its propaganda-material out by itself. Every new working-group must become a focus for independent reflection and push for the formation of other new groups'.<sup>42</sup>

Thus the 'working-groups' appeared as a sum of specialised and autonomous groups. This meant that divisions became wider and wider. Out of fear of centralism and regroupment, which were branded 'authoritarian', the GIC theorised the atomisation of existing forces: 'It is preferable that the revolutionary workers act on the development of consciousness in the class in thousands of small groups, rather than that their activity be subordinated to a big organisation which has to direct and dominate it'.<sup>43</sup>

The vagueness about the function of these groups led to a somewhat anarchic, even anarchist, kind of functioning.<sup>44</sup> With no executive organs, statutes, dues, organisational discipline or collective work, militant-activity was left to the goodwill of each individual conscience, which stood above any collective consciousness. In rejecting 'the old workers' movement where the organisation "leads" like an apparatus and where the individual member subordinates himself to this leadership',<sup>45</sup> the GIC deliberately minimised its own militant function. It inevitably appeared as a sum of individuals forming an opinion-group – to use Pannekoek's expression – and not a group for active intervention in the political and economic struggles of the workers.

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42 Canne Meijer, 'Das Werden einer neuen Arbeiterbewegung', in *Räte-Korrespondenz*, No. 8/9, April–May 1935.

43 Ibid.

44 At the time of the First International, the partisans of Bakunin were against any centralisation or organisational discipline, in the name of 'autonomy'. Engels's 1872 critique of a circular by the (anarchist) Jura Federation could also be applied to the organisational conceptions of the GIC in 1935:

'... the International is no more than a "free federation" of autonomous sections whose goal is the emancipation of the workers by the workers themselves, outside of any leading authority, even if it derives from the free consent of all. In consequence the General Council [of the International Workers Association] should be no more than a simple bureau of statistics and correspondence ... No question of regrouping forces or of joint action! If, in some section, the minority adapted to the majority, it would be committing a crime against the principles of liberty and would be approving a principle leading to authority and dictatorship! Above all, no disciplined sections, no concentration of forces around an objective, no weapons of combat!' (Engels, *Der Volksstaat*, 10 January 1872, cited in Dangeville (ed.) 1973, Vol. 3, pp. 52–9).

45 Canne Meijer, 'Das Werden einer neuen Arbeiterbewegung', *Räte-Korrespondenz*, No. 8/9, April–May 1935.

The result was a view that could be defined as academicism. The working-groups were like an array of little academies, each propagating a certain 'opinion'. Their task was educational, each member had to 'think and act for himself'; and sociological: 'the analysis of ever-changing social phenomena'.<sup>46</sup> Was it still possible to talk about political tasks for these groups?

### 3.5 *The Contradictions of the 'New Workers' Movement'*

The theory of the 'new workers' movement' was not a finished theory of the rejection of any revolutionary political organisation. The GIC affirmed that 'all these groups, like parties, have a political programme'.<sup>47</sup> If discussion-groups appeared, it was out of the question – as Pannekoek himself underlined – that the GIC should dissolve itself into them.<sup>48</sup>

At the same time, the formation of new groups was not an end in itself. There should be a movement towards regroupment, provided there was a theoretical and political agreement, expressing the maturation of the movement: 'If common work proves itself to be a success in practice, then there can be a real fusion into one large organisation of people with the same opinion. But fusion into a single organic unit can only be the fruit of a process of development'.<sup>49</sup>

In a lucid and somewhat paradoxical way, the GIC could see that the working-groups were not fail-safe. They were characterised by a great immaturity, by an 'insufficient theoretical foundation' and 'revolutionary impatience'. This immaturity, described as a 'childhood-disease', risked ultimately leading them towards a masked form of substitutionism, through 'the artificial unleashing of violent action', or at least trying to make 'revolutionary phrases' make up for their lack of clarity.<sup>50</sup>

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46 Ibid.

47 Ibid.

48 Pannekoek, 'Praktisch werk', *PIC*, No. 2, February 1936: 'the council-communists should not dissolve themselves into these groups'; 'they are themselves a group struggling for a certain idea'.

49 Canne Meijer, 'Das Werden einer neuen Arbeiterbewegung', *Räte-Korrespondenz*, No. 8/9, April–May 1935.

50 '... Their words are terribly "revolutionary", they paint the ruling class in horrifying colours, and they always end in a stereotyped manner, with the alternative: revolution or collapse into barbarism. They can thus feel very revolutionary and convince themselves that they are the precursors of the proletarian revolution ... The most revolutionary phrases cannot make up for a lack of class-clarity: the attempt to drag the proletariat onto the rails of revolution shows that these "precursors" lack the most elementary clarity on the conditions for the proletariat's struggle for its emancipation' (Ibid). In English: 'The Rise of a New Labour Movement', available at [www.left-dis.nl/uk/newlab.htm](http://www.left-dis.nl/uk/newlab.htm).

These statements prove that the GIC had not completely rejected the idea of the necessity for a political organisation founded not on 'opinions' but on a programme. As such, it still constituted a vanguard whose task was to regroup other, less politically mature groupings. In the discussion opened up by the publication of Canne Meijer's text, the most 'councilist' elements were not mistaken in saying that the GIC still had some sort of theory of a 'political vanguard':<sup>51</sup> 'The ideology of the working-groups is completely opposed to the self-activity of the masses; it spreads a whole ideology of vanguards, parties and leaders.'<sup>52</sup>

### 3.6 *The Copenhagen Conference (8–11 June 1935) and Its Consequences*

The GIC's theses on the revolutionary organisation met with strong opposition from the American and German council-communists. They unanimously rejected Canne Meijer's thesis that proletarian class-consciousness had been eclipsed and replaced by a 'dead thing'. Mattick's group underlined the 'distinctly idealist after-taste' of the GIC's conception.<sup>53</sup> But, above all, the American and German groups rejected the practical and organisational consequences of the theses on 'working-groups', which could only lead to the negation of the international work of the council-communists and the abandonment of any centralisation of common activity. Paul Mattick rejected the 'false conception of the Dutch' which called for 'the independence of the groups'. This was 'not only not Marxist but impossible in practice'; it was necessary to centralise the work of the different groups.<sup>54</sup> No less clearly, Helmut Wagner – a member of the German workers' groups in exile – saw the GIC's conception as regression to federalism: 'A federalist organisation cannot maintain itself because, in the current phase of monopoly-capitalism, it does not correspond to reality. It is a step backwards in relation to the old movement rather than being a step forward'.<sup>55</sup>

This disagreement on principles found full expression at the international conference of council-communists, the so-called Brussels Conference, held

51 This 'ultra'-councilist critique came from elements in Rotterdam who had been in Eduard Sirach's Spartacus group in 1933. Within the GIC, Bruun van Albada and Jan Appel defended a conception of the party which was clearly expressed in the *Spartacusbond* in 1945 (see Chapter Ten).

52 *PIC*, No. 1, January 1936.

53 'Problems of the new labour movement', *International Council Correspondence*, No. 2, January 1936, pp. 21–35; *PIC*, No. 2, February 1936; *Räte-Korrespondenz*, No. 15, March 1936.

54 Paul Mattick, in the name of the American council-communist groups.

55 *PIC*, No. 1, January 1936; *Räte-Korrespondenz*, No. 15, March 1936.

from 8–11 June 1935. In fact, this was held in Copenhagen. Brussels was mentioned in the council-communist press to create a smokescreen and thus escape the vigilant surveillance of the Gestapo. The eight delegates from Germany and the Netherlands met in the house of Andersen-Harild in Copenhagen. The seven-strong delegation from the ‘workers’ groups’ in Germany dominated the conference: the GIC had only sent one representative, Piet van Albada. The conference passed a resolution, written by Alfred Weiland and accepted by everyone, including the GIC’s delegate. This resolution implicated the whole of the international council-communist movement.

The resolution, entitled ‘Resolution of the Brussels Conference’, had important political and organisational consequences. It adopted the German theses on state-capitalism (see Chapter Five), which had been criticised by the GIC and Mattick’s group. But, above all, it clearly rejected the premises of *Towards a new workers’ movement*. The state of clandestinity in the fascist countries spoke in favour not of the federalism defended by the GIC, but of the strictest centralism. In Germany what was needed was not ‘working-groups’, but a system of groups of three people, clandestine and rigorously centralised. The survival of the organisation, both in Germany and the ‘democratic’ countries, demanded the centralisation of all the international work. In the historic period of totalitarian state-capitalism, it was necessary to organise the work of the internationalist council-communists in a highly centralised way, in order to build a single, unified organisation. The conference proposed:

1. To organise a more rigorous international collaboration through more frequent discussions;
2. To set up an international means of propagating our ideas;
3. To prepare the creation of an international committee to concentrate our work more firmly;
4. To ensure common international work through organisational and financial exchange;
5. To take charge of international aid and publication;
6. To open a general discussion aimed at formulating an international programme for the council-communists.<sup>56</sup>

Alongside these six points, it was decided that the GIC would take charge of financial solidarity for council-communist emigrants.

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<sup>56</sup> ‘Resolution der Brüsseler Konferenz’, *Räte-Korrespondenz*, No. 16–17, May 1936.

As might have been expected, the GIC rejected any centralised international work, which in practice required the formulation of an international programme and the establishment of an international bureau. For the Dutch, this was a new version of the Trotskyist Fourth International. 'The Fifth or Sixth International is present, here, in broad outline',<sup>57</sup> whereas the resolution actually merely envisaged the practical centralisation of activity. The GIC was opposed to any 'international party-work' on the 'basis of an accepted programme'. The principle of the autonomy of 'national' groups was proclaimed without hesitation:

Here, we will limit ourselves to noting that such a conception of the tasks of the new workers' movement is in contradiction with that of the Dutch groups. Frankly speaking, it means that the Dutch groups can have nothing to do with a common international work ... In our opinion, the revolutionary workers all over the world must form autonomous groups, with the aim of developing and orientating themselves. The recognition of a party- or council-programme would hamper the development of this autonomy.<sup>58</sup>

The support given to the Copenhagen resolution by Mattick's group in the USA bore no fruit.<sup>59</sup> The weight of the GIC and its 'councilist' conceptions was such that, after the end of 1935, the American group stopped calling itself the 'United Workers' Party'. Very quickly, the council-communist groups closed themselves off in their respective national arenas. Faced with major international events, such as the war in Abyssinia, the popular fronts, the war in Spain, Munich and the declaration of war, there were no joint international leaflets or action.<sup>60</sup> Above all, the abandonment of any centralised international work,

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57 Ibid.

58 'Antwort der GIKH', in *Räte-Korrespondenz*, No. 16–17, May 1936.

59 P.M. (Paul Mattick), 'The Brussels Conference', *International Council Correspondence for Theory and Discussion*, No. 10, Chicago, September 1935. However, although Mattick considered that a revolutionary organisation, distinct from the general organisation of the workers, was necessary, he also thought that the council-communists should 'disappear as a separate organisation as soon as the masses were organised in councils'. See also: 'Resolution der Brüsseler Konferenz' (Copenhagen Conference), *Räte-Korrespondenz*, No. 16/17, May 1936.

60 Joint work with two Belgian groups, the LCI and the IARV, was only undertaken during the events in Spain, and continued up until 1940 (see the chapter on the GIC's attitude to these events). The dismantling of the *Rote Kämpfer* by the Gestapo in 1936 and the

which was a matter of life or death for the groups of the German underground, had catastrophic effects. Left to themselves under the heel of repression, these groups soon fell apart. The German council-communist movement disappeared.

In practice, the theses on a new workers' movement made no small contribution to the organisational and political dislocation of the international council-communist movement.<sup>61</sup>

#### 4 An 'Economistic' Vision of the Revolution? The *Grundprinzipien*

By rejecting the political lessons of the Russian Revolution as a negative experience, by ultimately rejecting the necessity for a political organisation because it was 'haunted' by substitutionism, the GIC ended up seeing the future revolution not as a political question, but as an economic one.

**4.1** *The Means of the Proletarian Revolution: The Committees of Struggle*  
The proletarian revolution would be carried out by the workers' councils, bringing together the whole proletariat. But this was the final stage of a long and contradictory process that would pass through a whole series of economic strikes. These would necessarily be anti-union wildcat-strikes. This position, which had been repeated and developed since the birth of the GIC, was not very different from that of the Italian communist left in the 1930s.<sup>62</sup> Like the latter, but more boldly so, the GIC stressed the importance of the generalisation of the economic struggle in the form of the mass-strike. But unlike the Italian and Belgian 'Bordigists', it laid particular emphasis on the self-organisation of the wildcat-strikes. This meant the formation of 'committees of struggle' (*strid-*

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geographical distance between the Mattick group and the European 'centre' do not in themselves explain the dislocation of the international councilist movement. In 1939, Mattick defended the idea of the national autonomy of the council-communist groups: 'Each group acts in the context of the national framework in which it is situated, without any other group fixing a line of conduct for it': Mattick 1972, p. 79.

61 After 1936, the Mattick group was isolated within America. It disappeared in 1943, having published reviews like *Living Marxism* and *New Essays*. The Danish group fell apart in 1936. Andersen-Harild withdrew from political activity and ceased being an internationalist: during the war he put his home at the disposal of the council of the Danish Resistance. In the 1950s he joined the Socialist Party: letter from Gerd Callesen (ABA, Copenhagen) to Philippe Bourrinet, dated 1 March 1984.

62 See Bourrinet 1999.

*comités*), elected and recallable by all the workers in struggle.<sup>63</sup> As in Germany during and after the First World-War, the workers would elect trusted militants who were directly responsible to the strikers' general assemblies. All workers, regardless of what union- or political group they belonged to, could and must be part of the committees of struggle in order to achieve real 'class-unity'.<sup>64</sup> In order to avoid betraying their unitary function and turning into new unions, such committees could not be permanent: they arose and disappeared with the struggle itself. It was only in a revolutionary period that there could appear and develop really permanent organs, unitary in the sense of bringing together the whole proletariat: the workers' councils. But despite their spontaneous formation, the councils did not arise out of nowhere. The 'precursors' of this unitary self-organisation, preparing the 'class-organisation', were necessarily born before the outbreak of the mass-struggle. These 'embryos' of the councils were none other than the 'propaganda-nuclei', formed by militant workers who organised themselves and carried out agitation with a view to the future mass-struggles. But these 'propaganda-nuclei' could not proclaim themselves to be the unitary organisation itself: '... the propaganda-nucleus is not itself the class-organisation'.<sup>65</sup>

Such propaganda-nuclei were basically workers' groups with no real political orientation, but defending an 'opinion' in the class-struggle. But in practice the GIC seemed to confuse 'opinion-groups' – or the 'working-groups', in the Dutch left's theory – with these workers' groups. This gave rise to a disturbing confusion between workers' organisations and revolutionary organisations.

Given its 'anti-substitutionist' theory, the GIC denied both these 'opinion-groups' and the 'propaganda-nuclei' any political role in the workers' economic struggles. For Pannekoek, there was no point in these groups waging a political struggle to orient workers' strikes and demonstrations, in opposition to other groups and parties, even when the latter were working from within, from inside the factories, against workers' self-organisation. He was concerned to avoid breaking 'class-unity' through useless political confrontations:

Council-communism considers all workers to be part of a single class-unity, over and above the demarcations between organisations. It does not enter into competition with these organisations ... Council-com-

63 *PIC*, Nos. 1 and 4, February and June 1938.

64 *PIC*, No. 4, June 1938.

65 'De strijdcomités der wilde stakingen', *PIC*, No. 4, June 1938.

munism does not say to workers who are members of parties and organisations: 'leave them and join us'.<sup>66</sup>

This anti-political vision, in which the council-communist organisation was rigorously separated from, and external to, the workers' struggle, also had practical consequences.<sup>67</sup> For example, in the struggles of the unemployed in the Netherlands, in which the GIC intervened, the group's slogan when unemployed-committees were formed was 'outside all the unions and political parties'.<sup>68</sup>

For the Dutch council-communists, the same held true in a revolutionary period. When the workers' councils formed, they would rebuff any intervention by revolutionary parties in order to get on with the economic task of transforming society. There would have to be a radical separation between, on the one hand, the revolutionary groups 'forming an independent organisation of revolutionary workers in the freely acting working-groups' and, on the other hand, the 'independent organisation of the working masses in the workers' councils'.<sup>69</sup> The activity of revolutionary groups was limited to facilitating the economic tasks of the councils.

#### 4.2 *The Period of Transition from Capitalism to Communism: The Grundprinzipien*

The question of the period of transition towards communism after the seizure of power by the workers' councils was always approached by the German, then the Dutch council-communists from a strictly economic angle. According to the GIC, the degeneration of the Russian Revolution and the evolution of Soviet Russia towards state-capitalism proved the failure of 'politics', in which the dictatorship of the proletariat was seen first and foremost as a political dictatorship over the whole of society and which pushed the proletariat's economic tasks into the background. This idea was expressed with particular

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66 'Praktisch werk', *PIC*, No. 2, February 1936.

67 This conception was expressed early on in the 1931 pamphlet on the unemployed-movement: *Werkloozenbeweging en Klassenstrijd*. Some council-communist militants were active in the small unemployed workers' committee, the WAC, which was under control of the CPN.

68 'De stempelstaking, de Centrale Advies Commissie en de Communisten', *PIC*, No. 2, February 1932.

69 Canne Meijer, 'Das Werden einer neuen Arbeiterbewegung', *Räte-Korrespondenz*, No. 8/9, April–May 1935.



emphasis by Pannekoek: 'The traditional view is the domination of politics over the economy ... what the workers have to aim for is the domination over politics by the economy'.<sup>70</sup>

This view was exactly the reverse of the one held by other revolutionary groups in the 1930s, such as the Italian communist left, which had opened a whole theoretical discussion about the period of transition.<sup>71</sup>

Unlike the German and Italian communist lefts, the GIC did not show much interest in the political questions of the proletarian revolution, in theoretical reflections about the state in the transition-period.<sup>72</sup> The relationship between the new state of the transition-period, the revolutionary parties, and the workers' councils was never dealt with, despite the Russian experience. Neither is there anything on the relationship between the revolutionary International and the state, or states, in countries where the proletariat has taken political power. Likewise, the complex questions of proletarian violence and civil war in a revolutionary period were never posed.<sup>73</sup> It seems that for the GIC there was no problem of the existence of a state – or a semi-state – in the period of transition towards communism. The question of whether it would exist, and of what would be its nature (a 'proletarian' state or a 'scourge' inherited by the proletariat) was never posed. These problems were more or less evaded.

The GIC's main text on the period of transition, *The Fundamental Principles of Communist Production and Distribution* (*Grundprinzipien Kommunis-*

70 'De Arbeidersklasse en de Revolutie', *Radencommunisme*, No. 4, March–April 1940.

71 Some of *Bilan's* texts on the period of transition have been translated into Italian: see Erba and Peregalli (eds.) 1983.

72 The question of the state in the period of transition was raised above all by the Essen tendency of the KAPD in 1927. The workers' councils were identified with the 'proletarian' state: see KAZ (Essen), Nos. 1–11, 1927. The only contribution by the Berlin tendency was a text by Jan Appel ('Max Hempel') criticising 'Lenin's state-communism': 'Marx-Engels und Lenin über die Rolle des Staates in der proletarischen Revolution', *Proletarier*, Berlin, Nos. 4–6, May 1927.

73 Only Pannekoek studied the question of violence in the revolution, opposing both the anarchist principle of non-violence and emphasising the fundamental role of consciousness in the revolution:

'... non-violence cannot be a conception of the proletariat. The proletariat will use violence when the time comes as long as it is useful and necessary. At certain moments, workers' violence can play a decisive role, but the main strength of the proletariat lies in mastery over production ... The working class must use all methods of struggle that are useful and effective, according to circumstances. And in all these forms of struggle its internal, moral strength is primary.'

*tischer Produktion und Verteilung*) only dealt with the economic problems of this period.<sup>74</sup>

The GIC's starting-point was that the failure of the Russian Revolution and the evolution towards state-capitalism could only be explained through its ignorance of, or even its denial of the need for an economic transformation of society – this problem being common to the whole workers' movement. But paradoxically, the GIC recognised the fundamental role of the Russian experience, the only one that made it possible to take Marxist theory forwards:

... at least as far as industrial production was concerned ... Russia has attempted to order economic life according to the principles of communism ... and in this it has failed completely! ... Above all else, it has been the school of practice embodied in the Russian Revolution which we must thank for this knowledge, because it is this which has shown us in unmistakable terms exactly what the consequences are of permitting a central authority to establish itself as a social power which then proceeds to concentrate exclusively in its own hands all power over the productive apparatus.<sup>75</sup>

For the Dutch council-communists, the dictatorship of the proletariat immediately meant 'the association of free and equal producers'. The workers, organised in councils in the factories, had to take hold of the whole productive apparatus and make it work for their own needs as consumers, without resort to any central-state type body, since that could only mean perpetuating a society of inequality and exploitation. In this way, it would be possible to avoid a situation where the kind of 'state-communism' set up during the phase of war-communism in 1918–20 inevitably transforms itself into a form of state-capitalism whose production-needs dominate over those of the workers as producers and consumers. In the new society, dominated by the councils and not by a state led by a centralised party, wage-labour – the source of all inequality and all exploitation of labour-power – would be abolished.

For the GIC, in the final analysis, the problems of the transition-period were very simple: the main thing was that the producers should control and distrib-

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74 The *Grundprinzipien* were republished with an introduction by Paul Mattick in Berlin in 1970 by Rüdiger Blankertz Verlag. The Dutch edition, which contains many additions, was republished in 1972 by 'De Vlam', with an introduction by the *Spartacusbond*. A full English edition was published in London in 1999 by an 'independent group of communists': <http://reality.gn.apc.org/econ/giki.pdf>.

75 Appel 1970.

ute the social product in an egalitarian manner and by exercising authority 'from the bottom upwards'. The essential problem of the transition-period, as revealed by 1917, was not political – the question of the worldwide extension of the proletarian revolution – but economic. What counted was the immediate, egalitarian increase in workers' consumption, organised by the factory-councils. The only real problem of the transition-period, for the GIC, was the relationship between the producers and their products: 'It is the proletariat itself that lays in place the foundation-stone cementing the basic relationship between producers and the product of their labour. This, and this alone, is the key question of the proletarian revolution'.<sup>76</sup>

But how was the 'egalitarian' distribution of the social product to be achieved? Obviously not through simple juridical measures: nationalisation, 'socialisation', or the various forms of the takeover of private property by the state. According to the GIC, the solution lay in calculating the cost of production in terms of the labour-time expended in enterprises, in relation to the quantity of social goods created. Of course, depending on the respective productivity of the different enterprises, for the same product the quantity of labour required would be unequal. To resolve this problem, it would suffice to calculate the average social labour-time for each product. The quantity of labour expended in the most productive enterprises, those who were above the social average, would be contributed towards a general fund. This would bring the less productive enterprises up to the general level. At the same time, it would serve to bring about the technological progress necessary for the development of productivity in the enterprises of a given sector, so as to reduce average production-time.

The organisation of consumption was to be based on the same principles. A general system of social accounting, based on statistical documentation and established by the producer-consumers organised in councils and cooperatives, would be used to calculate the factors of consumption. After various deductions – replacing outworn machinery, technical improvements, a social-security fund for those unable to work, for natural disasters, and so on – there would be equal distribution of the social reserve for each consumer. Egalitarian conditions of production, assured by the calculation of average social labour-time, would be matched by generally equal conditions for all individual consumers. Thanks to this system of social accounting, the law of value would be done away with: products would no longer circulate on the basis of their exchange-value with money as the universal measure. Furthermore, with the establishment of a 'neutral' accounting and statistical centre, not detached

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76 Appel 1970, p. 30, emphasis by the GIC.

from the councils, and independent of any group of persons or of any central body, the new society would escape the danger of the formation of a parasitic bureaucracy that appropriated part of the social product.

The *Grundprinzipien* have the merit of underlining the importance of economic problems in the period of transition between capitalism and communism, all the more so because this had only very rarely been addressed in the revolutionary movement. Without a real and continuous increase in workers' consumption, the dictatorship of the proletariat has no meaning, and the realisation of communism would be a pious wish.

But the GIC's text suffered from a certain number of weaknesses, which did not go unnoticed by other revolutionary groups.<sup>77</sup>

The *Grundprinzipien* actually only deal with the evolved phase of communism, where the government of men had been replaced by the 'administration of things', according to the principle of 'from each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs' articulated by Marx. The GIC believed that it would be immediately possible, as soon as the workers' councils had taken power in a given country, to proceed to a developed form of communism. It started off from an ideal situation, in which the victorious proletariat has taken over the productive apparatus of the highly developed countries and has been spared all the costs of the civil war (destruction and a large part of production going towards military needs); moreover, it assumes that there will be no peasant-question standing in the way of the socialisation of production, since, according to the GIC, agricultural production was already completely industrial and socialised.<sup>78</sup> Finally, neither the isolation of one or several proletarian revolutions, nor the anachronisms of small-scale agricultural production, constituted a major obstacle to the establishment of communism: 'Neither the absence of the world-revolution, nor the unsuitability of the individual agricultural enterprises in the countryside to state management, can be held responsible for the failure of the Russian Revolution ... at the economic level.'<sup>79</sup>

Thus, the GIC distanced itself from the Marxist vision of the transition-period, which distinguished two phases: a lower stage, sometimes described as socialism, in which the 'government of men' determined a proletarian eco-

77 A critique of the GIC's text was published in *Bilan* from No. 11 to No. 38, written by Mitchell, a member of the Belgian LCI (his real name was Jean Melis (1892–1945), a.k.a. *Jehan* or *Mitchell*). Hennaut, for the LCI, produced a resumé of the *Grundprinzipien* in *Bilan*, Nos. 19, 20, and 21.

78 This thesis had been advanced in 1933 by the GIC, in the pamphlet *Ontwikkelingslijnen in de landbouw*, pp. 1–48. B.A. Sijes was the author of this pamphlet.

79 Appel 1972, p. 10.

nomic policy in a society still dominated by scarcity; and a higher phase, that of communism proper, a society without classes, without the law of value, where the productive forces develop freely, on a world-scale, unencumbered by national boundaries. But even for the lower stage of the transition-period, still dominated by the law of value and the existence of backwards-pulling classes, Marxism emphasised that the condition for any economic transformation in a socialist direction is the triumph of the world-revolution. The beginning of any real economic transformation of the new society, still divided into classes, depends in the first place on the proletariat affirming itself politically in the face of other classes.

The GIC's 'economistic' vision was connected to its inability to grasp the problem of the existence of a state – according to Engels, a 'semi-state' – in the period of the dictatorship of the proletariat, at the beginning of the transitional stage. This semi-state constitutes a danger for the proletarian power, since it is a force for social conservatism, 'arisen out of society, but placing itself above it and increasingly alienating itself from it'.<sup>80</sup>

The GIC's theory of the transition-period seems close to anarchist theory, denying the existence of a state and thus of a political struggle for the domination of the new society. The basically 'technical' role that the GIC gave the workers, who are charged with keeping account of the average social labour-time in production, was an implicit denial of their political role.

Like the anarchists, the GIC saw the building of a communist society as a more-or-less natural and automatic process. Not the culmination of a long, contradictory process of class-struggle for the domination of the semi-state, against all the conservative forces, but the fruit of a linear, harmonious, almost mathematical development. This view has a certain resemblance to the ideas of the nineteenth-century utopian socialists, particularly Fourier's 'Universal Harmony'.<sup>81</sup>

The final weakness of the *Grundprinzipien* lies in the very question of the accounting of labour-time, even in an advanced communist society that has gone beyond scarcity. Economically, this system could reintroduce the law of value, by giving the labour-time needed for production an accounted value, rather than a social one. Here, the GIC goes against Marx, for whom the standard measure in communist society is no longer labour-time, but free time, leisure-time.<sup>82</sup>

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80 Engels 1946, p. 194.

81 This return to utopia can be found in Rühle, who in 1939 made a study of utopian movements, *Mut zur Utopie!* (see Rühle 1971a).

82 As Marx writes in the *Grundrisse*:

In the second place, the existence of a 'neutral', supposedly technical accounting-centre does not offer a sufficient guarantee for the construction of communism. This 'centre' could end up becoming an end in itself, accumulating hours of social labour to the detriment of the consumption-needs and free time of the producer-consumers, and becoming increasingly autonomous from society. If the producers 'at the base' became less and less concerned with controlling the 'centre' and with social organisation in general, there would inevitably be a transfer of the functions that ought to be carried out by producers' organisations to 'technical' bodies that more and more take on a life of their own. The GIC's denial of these potential dangers was not without consequences. The Dutch internationalists ended up rejecting any possibility that, even under communism, there could be a struggle by the producers to improve their conditions of work and of existence: the GIC refused to envisage the possibility of a society in which the struggle 'for better living-conditions never finished' and where 'the struggle for the distribution of products goes on'.<sup>83</sup> Does this not reintroduce the idea that the producer-consumers cannot struggle against themselves, including their 'accounting-centre'?

For the GIC, communism appears as an absolute equality between producers, which is to be realised right at the beginning of the transition-period.<sup>84</sup> It is as though, under communism, there is no longer any natural (physical or psychological) inequality in production and consumption. But in fact, communism can be defined as 'real equality in a natural inequality'.<sup>85</sup>

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'Once they have done so – and *disposable time* thereby ceases to have an *antithetical* existence – then, on one hand, necessary labour-time will be measured by the needs of the social individual, and, on the other, the development of the power of social production will grow so rapidly that, even though production is now calculated for the wealth of all, *disposable time* will grow for all. For real wealth is the developed productive power of all individuals. The measure of wealth is then not any longer, in any way, labour time, but rather disposable time. *Labour-time as the measure of value* posits wealth itself as founded on poverty, and disposable time as existing *in and because of the antithesis to surplus labour-time*; or, the positing of an individual's entire time as labour time, and his degradation therefore to mere worker, subsumption under labour. *The most developed machinery thus forces the worker to work longer than the savage does, or than he himself did with the simplest, crudest tools*' (Marx 1973, p. 710).

83 Appel 1970, p. 40.

84 Most of the communist lefts insisted, by contrast, that equality in the distribution of consumer products was impossible right at the beginning of the period of transition. Above all in a period of civil war, where the new power of the councils would have to rely on the existence of specialists.

85 Mitchell, 'Problèmes de la période de transition', *Bilan*, No. 35, September–October 1936.

### 4.3 Pannekoek's Position on the Grundprinzipien

Pannekoek, who was asked by Canne Meijer to write a preface to Appel's book in 1930, had a lot of doubts about writing a book on the economic transformations of the transition-period. Considering himself to be 'none too familiar with these questions', it at first seemed to him somewhat 'utopian' to try to set up such schemas.<sup>86</sup> Then, after reading the *Grundprinzipien*, he believed that it 'deserved attention'.<sup>87</sup>

In fact, Pannekoek's position on these questions was expressed some fifteen years later in the book *The Workers' Councils*. It was not far-removed from the theoretical conclusions of the *Grundprinzipien*, but it was rather more connected to historical reality.

Like the *Grundprinzipien*, Pannekoek was in favour of a system of accounting on the basis of labour-time: '... in the new system of production, the essential element is the hours of labour, whether expressed in the initial period in monetary units or in a real form'.<sup>88</sup> Like the GIC, Pannekoek had a tendency to reduce the economic problems of the transition-period to a technical and statistical matter:

The general accounting-system, which concerns and encompasses the administration of the different enterprises, unites them all in an economic process of society as a whole ... The basis of the social organisation of production is good management through the use of statistics and accounting ... The production process is revealed to all in the form of a simple and intelligible numerical image.<sup>89</sup>

This administrative conception, determined by a statistical rather than a social reality, led to the idea of an administrative organisation of the new society, a pure 'administration of things' in the form of 'accounting-offices': Once production has been organised, administration becomes the relatively simple task of a network of inter-connected "accounting offices".<sup>90</sup>

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86 Pannekoek 1982, p. 215.

87 Pannekoek 1972. In a recorded interview with Fred Ortmans and Piet Roberts on 11 June 1978, Jan Appel mentions a discussion with Gorter, in Spring 1927, on the *Grundprinzipien*, in the presence of Piet Coerman and Gerrit Jordens. Gorter disagreed with Jan Appel and expressed agreement with Lenin's view in *State and Revolution*: production organised like the railways.

88 Pannekoek 1974a, p. 78.

89 Pannekoek 1974a, pp. 86–7.

90 Pannekoek 1974a, p. 86.

Like the GIC, Pannekoek only dealt with the higher stage of communism. The workers' councils, the organisations of real workers' democracy, only have a decision-making role at the level of production, not at the political level. Because 'politics itself will have disappeared',<sup>91</sup> the councils have no governmental functions. There is no 'council-government', which had been the slogan in the revolutionary period of 1917–21. 'The councils are not a government. Even the most centralised councils do not have a governmental character, because they have no way of imposing their will on the masses; they are not organs of power'.<sup>92</sup>

Authority over maintaining social order and of class-violence, typical of any state-structure, could not be in the hands of a central power: 'All social power belongs to the workers themselves. Wherever it is necessary to exercise this power – against disturbances or attacks on the existing order – it emanates from the workers' collectives in the workshops and remains under their control'.<sup>93</sup>

This affirmation of Pannekoek's on the 'social power' of the 'workers' collectives' shows that the question of the withering-away of the state and of social classes, as analysed by Marx and Engels, was not dealt with in *The Workers' Councils*. It seems, in fact, that Pannekoek envisaged the existence of a semi-state in the higher stage of communism, still exerting some form of violence. If 'workers' collectives' – and thus classes, not a classless society of producers – still existed, was this not an admission that the state still existed as well? Even if this state-power was called 'social', even if it was decentralised from councils to 'collectives', was this not an admission that class-political power still existed? To these questions, there was no response from Pannekoek.

The *Workers' Councils* implicitly criticised the *Grundprinzipien* on two essential points:

- The early days of the period of transition between capitalism and communism would be marked by scarcity, given the need to reconstruct an economy ruined either by the civil war or the global economic crisis (Pannekoek was not precise about this). It would still be an economy of war and scarcity, in which justice in the distribution of consumer-goods would be based not on a fair accounting of hours of labour, but on the coercive – but moral – principle of obliging everyone to work for the community:

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91 Pannekoek 1974a, p. 125.

92 Pannekoek 1974a, p. 126.

93 Pannekoek 1974a.



At the beginning of the period of transition, when the economy will be in ruins, the essential problem will be to set up an apparatus of production and to ensure the immediate existence of the population. It is very possible that, in these conditions, basic food-supplies will be distributed uniformly, as is always done in times of war or famine. But it is more likely that, in this phase of reconstruction, in which all available forces will be used to the full, and in which the new moral principles of common labour will only take shape in a gradual manner, the right to consume will be linked to the accomplishment of some kind of labour. The old popular adage, 'he who does not work, shall not eat' expresses an instinctive feeling of justice.<sup>94</sup>

- The accounting of the hours of labour carried out by each worker would not imply that each individual would consume an equivalent to the hours of work he had carried out. The distribution of consumer goods would not be an egalitarian principle for each individual; it would still be based on inequality. Consumption was to be a general social process, eliminating the direct relationship between producer and product. This was an implicit criticism of the GIC:

... This does not mean that the whole of production will be distributed among the producers on a pro-rata basis according to the number of hours of labour carried out by each individual, or, in other words, that each worker will receive in products the exact equivalent of the time he has spent working. In reality, a very considerable part of work will have to be devoted to the common property, to perfecting and enlarging the productive apparatus ... Moreover, it will be necessary to allocate part of the overall labour-time to activities which are unproductive but socially necessary: general administration, education, health-services ...<sup>95</sup>

Pannekoek's analysis, in the light of his brief theoretical forays into the period of transition, seems to be much more nourished by concrete historical experiences (the Russian Revolution and war-communism) and less marked by egalitarian utopianism than that of the GIC. In his rejection of 'equal rights' in the distribution of consumer-goods, he seems to be closer to Marx's analysis in his

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94 Pannekoek 1974a, pp. 84–5.

95 Pannekoek 1974a, p. 85.

*Critique of the Gotha Programme*. The latter showed that an equal distribution based on labour-time would straight away lead to new inequalities, since the producers necessarily differed from one another in terms of their capacity for work, their family-commitments, their physical condition, and so on.

However, like the *Grundprinzipien*, the *Workers' Councils* remained stuck in a technical, accounting-focused, clearly 'economistic' problematic. The complex issues of the state and the proletariat's rule in the transitional society were never posed. On the economic level, the work completely ignores the decisive question of whether an abundance of consumer-goods under communism would make the calculation of individual labour-time useless. It seems that council-communism found it hard to conceive of a communist society based not on scarcity but on abundance.

## 5 An Anti-Leninist Philosophy? – Pannekoek's Book: *Lenin as Philosopher* (1938)

In Amsterdam in 1938, Pannekoek published the book *Lenin as Philosopher*, whose original version was written in German.<sup>96</sup> Published under the pseudonym John Harper, this work can be considered – along with the *Theses on Bolshevism*, *Towards a New Workers' Movement* and the *Grundprinzipien* – as one of the four pillars of 'councilist' theory. For Pannekoek and the council-communist movement, this was a 'Marxist response' to Lenin's book *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* which, published in Russian in 1909, was not translated into German and English until 1927.<sup>97</sup> In the period when Stalinism was really coming into its own, claiming to be the ideological completion of 'Leninism', Lenin's book was exalted in the Comintern as a 'deepening of Marxism' on

96 *Lenin als Philosoph. Kritische Betrachtung der philosophischen Grundlagen des Leninismus*, Bibliothek der 'Rätekorrespondenz', No. 1, Ausgabe der Gruppe Internationaler Kommunisten in Holland 1938; reprinted in 1969, Frankfurt. *New Essays* published an English translation, *Lenin as Philosopher*, in New York in 1938. A Dutch translation was published by *De Vlam* in 1974, with an introduction by B.A. Sijes. The French translation was published for the first time by the *Gauche Communiste de France* (GCF) in its theoretical review *Internationalisme*, in 1947, Nos. 18–29. A critique of both was written by 'Mouso' (Robert Salama, 1919–69) and 'Philippe' or 'Morel' (Pierre Bessaignet, who became later an ethnologist) in Nos. 30–33, 1948. The articles criticising Pannekoek were republished in the ICC's *International Review* Nos. 25, 27, 28, 30, 1981–2. A new French translation was produced in 1970 by Daniel Saint-James and Claude Simon, published by Cahiers Spartacus.

97 Lenin 1962a.

the philosophical level.<sup>98</sup> It was even considered to be the philosophical basis of the 'Leninism' now being celebrated in the Comintern.<sup>99</sup>

But Lenin's book appeared in a given historical context, and was of sharply polemical character. In the Russian Social-Democratic Party – in both Menshevik and Bolshevik factions – around 1904, there had arisen a lively interest in the theories of the Austrian physicist Ernst Mach and the Swiss philosopher Richard Avenarius.<sup>100</sup> This current was defined as 'empirio-monism'. Against the background of a dizzying growth in the physical sciences, and strongly influenced by epistemological reflection about science itself, the current was looking for a 'monist' synthesis of the most recent developments in knowledge. It was also an 'empirio-criticism' that rejected the old dualist conceptions which separated the object and the subject of knowledge. It sought to go beyond positivism and empiricism by building a 'subjectivist' theory of knowledge. Empirio-criticism was part of the philosophical trend towards a 'return to Kant', a trend which impregnated the revisionist and Austromarxist tendencies (see Chapter Two) opposed by Marxism. It reduced the world to a system of objects elaborated through the sensations of the subjective psyche. There was not a dialectical interaction between object and subject, but an identity, even a fusion between matter and spirit. By only bringing out the 'subjective' side of knowledge, and by seeing 'personal mediation' as the source of this knowledge, empirio-criticism presented itself as a form of individualism which turned social existence into an abstraction. By making the physical world an immediate, empirical, and immutable order, it ignored the fact that the world is in perpetual transformation. By stopping at the 'intersubjective' world of mental

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98 Between 1924 and 1926 Stalin published *The Principles of Leninism* and *The Foundations of Leninism*, which argued the basis for 'socialism in one country'. This theory, which represented an abandonment of the principles of internationalism, was made official by the Russian party at its Fourteenth Congress (April 1925) and in the Comintern at the Fifth Plenum of its Enlarged Executive (April 1925).

99 See Korsch 1970. The exaltation of 'Marxist-Leninist' philosophy was begun in 1924 by Abram Deborin, who became a member of the Praesidium of the USSR's Academy of Sciences in 1935. See his book (in German) *Lenin – der Kämpfende Materialist*: Deborin 1971.

100 The term 'Empirio-Criticism' was used for the first time by the Swiss philosopher Richard Avenarius (1843–96), in the book: *Kritik der reinen Erfahrung* (Leipzig, 1888, and 1907–8). Ernst Mach (1838–1916) was one of the main sources of contemporary neo-positivism, known as 'logical positivism' or the 'Vienna circle' (Rudolf Carnap, Philipp Franck, Otto Neurath, Hans Reichenbach, Moritz Schlick, Ludwig Wittgenstein *et al.*), based on formal logic. Mach had published his famous book *Erkenntnis und Irrtum. Skizzen zur Psychologie der Forschung* in Leipzig in 1905.

elements, it 'refuted' materialism. With Mach, the propagation of an 'epistemological' doubt about the reality of material objects led to a form of idealism, corresponding to the general tendency in the bourgeois world towards a vague scientific 'mysticism'. On the other hand, with Avenarius, idealism was accompanied by a biological materialism, according to which the influence of the external environment on the subject could be reduced to changes in cerebral matter and the neurological system. As such, empirio-criticism corresponded to a crisis in the theory of science and in the capitalist world in general, one which had indirect repercussions in the Marxist camp itself. Hence the political stakes involved.

Within the RSDLP, and especially in the Bolshevik fraction, there was a whole tendency, represented principally by Bazarov, Lunacharsky and Bogdanov, that defended – within the party and even outside of it – the empirio-critical conceptions of Mach and Avenarius, with the aim of 'going beyond' Marx's limitations.<sup>101</sup> With Bogdanov, the social process was reduced to the biological process of the organism adapting to the environment, and the relations of production were reduced to the purely technical aspects of the organisation of labour<sup>102</sup> – a thesis that in some ways prefigured the Stalinist view.<sup>103</sup> At the same time, by affirming that 'social life is, in all its manifestations, a conscious psychic life', that 'social existence and social consciousness are identical in the exact sense of the word', Bogdanov denied the Marxist thesis that consciousness only reflects social life to a greater or lesser extent, that it lags behind it, and that material social existence develops independently of the social consciousness of humanity.<sup>104</sup> The implications of Bogdanov's view were that social classes were always conscious of the social relations presiding over their activity in production, and thus that the revolutionary conscious-

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101 Bogdanov and his brother-in-law Anatoli Lunacharsky were at the head of the left-Bolshevik faction, which in 1907 called for a boycott of the Duma. Eliminated from the leadership of the Bolshevik party, it regrouped in 1909 around the periodical *Vpered*. See the detailed biographies of Bogdanov – *nom de plume* of Aleksandr Malinovski – and Lunacharsky, in Haupt and Marie 1974. For the political collaboration/antagonism between Bogdanov and Lenin, see Sarapov 1998.

Vladimir Bazarov was the *nom de plume* of V.A. Rudnev (1874–1940). He had been a Bolshevik from 1904 until early 1917, when he became involved in an attempt to regroup the anti-war Russian socialists and overcome their old factional division between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks.

102 D. Lecourt, in Bogdanov 1977, pp. 9–41.

103 D. Lecourt, in Bogdanov 1977, p. 28.

104 Lenin 1967b.

ness of the proletariat – which, in Marxist theory, is alone capable of seeing social reality clearly – was no different from the consciousness of other, non-proletarian social strata. In this sense, Bogdanov was simply reflecting his old populist conceptions, which Bolshevism had always fought against. Under the cover of 'empirio-criticism', Bogdanov's theories opened the door to a mechanistic, fatalistic conception of the revolutionary process as well as to idealist voluntarism on the political level. It was no accident that Bogdanov and his partisans, no doubt underestimating the extent of the defeat of the 1905 Revolution, between 1907 and 1909 formed the otzovist ('recallist') fraction, which called for the resignation of the socialist MPs. Allied with the 'ultimatumist' fraction, it demanded the abandonment of all legal activity. In the atmosphere of ideological disarray born out of the defeat, certain Bolshevik intellectuals like Lunacharsky, who was close to Bogdanov, advocated the creation of a new 'socialist religion' and tried to reconcile Marxism and religion. Known as the 'God-builders', this tendency expressed a philosophical idealism accompanied by voluntarism on the political level. The otzovist, ultimatumist and God-building currents rallied together in the Bolshevik party, and seemed to put into question its Marxist philosophical and political foundations.

Lenin's book *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* can only be understood in this precise historical context, a period of defeat and disorientation. Lenin, as he admitted to Gorky, did not consider himself particularly competent in philosophical matters.<sup>105</sup> He wanted to write, not a treatise in materialist philosophy, but a work of political polemic. The struggle against the theories of Mach ('Machism') and Avenarius and against Bogdanov's empirio-criticism was seen as a party-struggle, because 'The struggle between parties in philosophy' reflected 'in the last instance, the tendencies and ideologies of enemy classes in contemporary society'.<sup>106</sup> Hence Lenin's tendency to simplify philosophical problems, and to assimilate any struggle against idealism with the struggle against religion. What he calls the fight against 'fideism' in his book was, in fact, a fight against the religious tendencies expressed by Lunacharsky. It should be stressed that there was no attempt, here, to edify a 'Leninist philosophy' – this would have been unthinkable in the Bolshevik party of the time. Like the other Marxists of his day, Lenin considered the theories of Mach and Bogdanov to be a private matter in the RSDLP and the Bolshevik fraction. This 'philosophical quarrel', he thought, should not 'become a factional issue'. With his great sense

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105 Lenin 1972a, pp. 448–54.

106 Ibid.

of the organisation, Lenin judged it necessary 'to guard against the indispensable practical work of the party suffering in any way'.<sup>107</sup>

It was in 1924, on Deborin's initiative,<sup>108</sup> and by taking it out of the context in which it was written, that Lenin's book became the Comintern's 'bible' of the new 'Marxist-Leninist philosophy', used to reduce Marxism – as Korsch<sup>109</sup> and Pannekoek insisted – to 'vulgar bourgeois materialism'.

When Pannekoek became aware of Lenin's book, in 1927, it seemed 'explicitly' apparent to him that Lenin 'had adopted the viewpoint of bourgeois materialism' and that there was a connection between 'Leninism and the philosophical basis of the Russian Revolution'.<sup>110</sup> However, in *Lenin as Philosopher*, Pannekoek felt it necessary to underline that 'Lenin and his party showed themselves to be, in theory and practice, the most eminent representatives of Marxism'.<sup>111</sup> Finally, for Pannekoek, the bourgeois essence of Leninism became clear after the event, with the evolution of the Russian Revolution towards state-capitalism and Stalinism.

Pannekoek's book appears to the reader not as a critique of 'Leninism' – understood as a state-capitalist conception – but as a ruthless (and pertinent) criticism of *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*. It was written by a highly respected scientist, *au fait* with the most recent scientific discoveries and methods, and a Marxist of the first order, recognised as such by the Russian Academy of Science in 1927.<sup>112</sup> *Lenin as Philosopher* was remarkable for the depth of its argument. At this level, it was in continuity with Pannekoek's Marxist activity prior to the First World-War. But it moved away from this in the 'councilist' conceptions, which argued – in a conclusion that was not philosophical, but political – that Lenin's philosophical theories explained and prefigured the degeneration of the Russian Revolution.

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107 Lenin 1966, pp. 388–90.

108 Abram Deborin (1881–1963) is known for his systematic attacks, from 1924 onwards, against Lukács (*History and Class Consciousness*) and Korsch, who dared to distance themselves from the 'Leninist' theory put forwards first by Zinoviev and then by Stalin. Reprint of his 1924 pamphlet: Deborin 1971.

109 Korsch 1970.

110 Pannekoek 1982, p. 217.

111 Pannekoek 1970, p. 17.

112 In 1927, the scientific section of the state publishing house wrote a letter to Pannekoek, recognising him as an 'orthodox Marxist', and inviting him to write a study of dialectics in the domain of physics and astronomy (Pannekoek Archives, 11SG 81a; cited in Malandrino 1987, p. 231).

Pannekoek's 'Marxist pertinence' lies firstly in his critique of Lenin's response to the 'Machists'. Noting that Lenin was 'quite right to oppose them' and that 'Marxist theory can draw nothing of importance from Mach's ideas',<sup>113</sup> he went on to attack Lenin's actual arguments. In effect, Lenin saw Mach's theories as a modern version of Berkeley's 'solipsist' philosophy, according to which reality does not exist outside the mind that perceives it. In line with bourgeois philosophy of the eighteenth century, particularly that of Condillac, Lenin developed a 'sensualist' theory of knowledge. According to this, knowledge is elaborated through the senses. Thus, Pannekoek showed, Lenin saw no difference between Marx's dialectical materialism and bourgeois materialism.<sup>114</sup> Hence a doctrine of 'common sense' in which, in a naive, absolute and purely empirical manner, theory 'precisely reflects reality'. Lenin's theory was thus regression at the level of materialist knowledge. As in the days of Newton, the century of mechanisms and automata, Lenin accepted the idea of an absolute mechanism of nature. For him, materialism had to affirm the existence of absolute time and space. As Pannekoek showed, this not only meant denying that the progress of science had proved the relativity of time and space, as with Einstein; it also meant arguing that immediate sensual observation was an exact reflection, in the brain, of material reality, the latter seen as an ensemble of absolute and immutable laws.

In the second place, Lenin gave a false form to his argument, by distorting the views of Avenarius and Mach. Their doctrine had nothing to do with Berkeley's 'solipsism'. Their conception was more a kind of empiricist positivism. Their empirio-criticism was quite close to the 'logical empiricism' of Carnap, the aim of which was to construct a coherent and ordered system of all physical and mental objects.<sup>115</sup> For them, it was not thought (or the thinking subject) that created the objective world; rather 'The actions of the external world on our brains produce what we call thought'.<sup>116</sup> Contrary to the classical ideal-

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113 Pannekoek 1970, p. 74.

114 Lenin 1967b 'On all the other more elementary questions of materialism (distorted by the disciples of Mach) there is not and cannot be any difference between Marx and Engels and all these old materialists'. In *The Dialectics of Nature*, Engels reproached the materialists of the eighteenth century with having had a mechanical and metaphysical way of thinking.

115 The crucial works of Rudolf Carnap (1891–1970) are *Der logische Aufbau der Welt* and *Logische Syntax der Sprache*. Carnap's scientific positivism, very much in vogue in the Anglo-Saxon world, was followed by Pannekoek. But Pannekoek never defined himself as a 'philosopher' and never identified himself with 'neo-positivism'.

116 Pannekoek 1970, p. 77.

ists, like Berkeley, or the eighteenth-century materialists, empirio-criticism did not make an absolute separation between physical and mental objects, both of which are objects of knowledge. In fact, as Pannekoek shows, Lenin commits several errors that distance him from dialectical and historical materialism:

- he confuses observed facts and physical concepts, returning to the old, and naive ‘common-sense’ view of knowledge, which can ‘very easily oppose the progress of the sciences towards new and better conceptions’;<sup>117</sup>
- he identifies ‘nature’ with physical ‘matter’. For him, the word ‘matter’ has the same meaning as ‘objective world’. But for historical materialism ‘matter’ refers to everything which ‘really exists in the world, including mind and fantasy’ as Dietzgen used to say.<sup>118</sup> It follows that Lenin, like the bourgeois materialist, reduces any other reality, such as thought or mental phenomena, to simple attributes or properties of matter;
- he does not understand that ‘matter’ is an ‘abstraction’ formed on the basis of phenomena<sup>119</sup> and never an ‘absolute’ reality. To affirm that man, in history, is the creator of natural laws does not make ‘the human mind the creator of the world’<sup>120</sup> as Lenin thought, seeing this as pure idealism. In fact, laws are indeed a product of the evolution of human thought. Like human ideas, they ‘belong to objective reality as surely as palpable objects; the real world is constituted by objects of the mind as well as the objects physics calls material’;<sup>121</sup>
- finally, again in the domain of knowledge, Lenin falls into a ‘materialist’ metaphysic by taking the historical dimension away from materialism. Any dialectical materialism is necessarily a historical materialism, even in the realm of knowledge. This is why there can be no ‘absolute laws’ that are a simple, immutable photograph of reality;<sup>122</sup>
- there can be no absolute precision in the description of reality; theory is an ‘approximate image’ which gets more precise with the evolution of human knowledge. This is explained by the fact that absolute necessity, as a form of determinism, only applies to the cosmos taken as a whole: ‘the laws of

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117 Pannekoek 1970, p. 80.

118 Pannekoek 1970, p. 91.

119 Pannekoek 1970, p. 47.

120 Pannekoek 1970, p. 82.

121 Pannekoek 1970, p. 91.

122 Lenin 1967b: ‘materialism consists precisely in admitting that theory is an approximate copy of objective reality’.



nature are imperfect human formulations, restricted to particular spheres, of necessity in nature. Absolute necessity only has any sense for the universe as a whole',<sup>123</sup>

But for Pannekoek, Lenin's most serious fault was not his errors in the domain of knowledge – which could be put down to Russia's backwardness – but his basic approach. By opposing reason to religion – 'fideism' – and 'free thought' to 'obscurantism', Lenin, like Plekhanov before him, resuscitated pre-Marxist bourgeois materialism. Instead of dealing with the problem of idealism from the standpoint of historical materialism, Lenin reduced Marxism to a simple 'war-machine' against religion. Hence his admiration for Ernst Haeckel,<sup>124</sup> even though the latter was a Social Democrat and a bitter adversary of 'egalitarian socialism'.<sup>125</sup> In fact, Lenin – blinded by bourgeois materialism, which denies the existence of social classes and proclaims itself the champion of humanity's fight against religious obscurantism – abandons the class-analysis of ideas in philosophy: 'Nowhere does Lenin mention the fact that ideas are determined by social class; theoretical divergences hover in the air with no link to social reality ... This essential aspect of Marxism seems not to exist for Lenin'.<sup>126</sup>

There is no doubt that Pannekoek's philosophical critique of Lenin is entirely in accordance with the Marxist theory of materialism.<sup>127</sup> His critique of the Bolshevik leader makes no concession to the 'subjectivism' of the empirio-criticism of Mach and Avenarius. Mach expressed, above all, the 'spontaneous materialism' of the scientist, to some degree disconnected from the idealist prejudices of his period. To criticise his arguments properly meant showing that the valid elements in his approach were what were close to dialectical material-

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123 Pannekoek 1970, p. 50.

124 Known for his book *The Marvels of Life*, the neo-Darwinist Ernst Haeckel (1834–1919), criticised by Engels in his *Dialectics of Nature*, was not only in vogue amongst Russian Marxists – as Pannekoek claims – but also among the German Marxists, including Mehring, in principle more 'advanced' than Lenin. In all logic, Pannekoek should not have simply rejected 'bourgeois materialism' in Russia, but also the whole of contemporary Marxism in advanced countries like Germany.

125 Pannekoek 1970, p. 96.

126 Pannekoek 1970, p. 95.

127 See Engels 1987: 'Matter as such is a pure creation of thought, a pure abstraction. Matter as such, as opposed to definitive, existing material things, has no tangible existence'. Or again: 'it is precisely the transformation of nature by man, and not nature alone as such, which is the most essential and most direct foundation of human thought, and man's intelligence has grown to the extent that he has learned to transform nature'. This Marxist vision is further developed in Pannekoek 1953.

ism. If Mach was 'very close to the method of historical materialism'<sup>128</sup> it was by way of his affirmation of the principle of 'the economy of thought' as a guide to the scientist in the elaboration of laws and abstractions. If, concretely, Mach's principles proved to be 'the best guide to overcoming the difficulties' of method in the sphere of atomic theory and relativity,<sup>129</sup> it was in applying this principle. It was a question of seeking which experience could confirm and refute such-and-such scientific assertion. By first recognising the relative validity of this current at the epistemological level, Marxism could then take up the critique of the theories of Mach and Avenarius. Such a Marxist critique involved unmasking the social ideology propagated by this current. By developing a subjectivist theory, close to classical 'philosophical meditation', and founded on personal experience, it ended up exalting the individual and, in this sense, was still marked by bourgeois materialism. This individualism, a 'consequence of the unbridled individualism of bourgeois society' is a bourgeois philosophy opposed to Marxism, which sees 'the source of knowledge' in 'social labour'. On the other hand, by making the world an immutable essence, 'where the fact that the world is in perpetual evolution is left to one side',<sup>130</sup> the position of Mach-Avenarius forges an ideology that ends up 'rejecting' materialism, the theory of the continuous evolution of social labour. Tied by a thousand strings to the bourgeois world, even at the price of concessions to historical materialism, Mach and Avenarius – like many others – necessarily fell into idealism, 'an ambiguity revealing a penchant towards subjectivism, corresponding to the general tendency towards mysticism in the bourgeois world'.<sup>131</sup>

Thus, Pannekoek stressed that in the theoretical struggle, Marxism, in contrast to Lenin and Plekhanov, must firmly reject the old bourgeois materialism. The latter bases itself on the sciences of nature, but defines man, and thus the proletariat, as a simple object of nature, the highest animal on the zoological ladder, totally determined by immutable 'natural laws'. It is thus the negation of the social praxis of the proletariat which overturns and destroys the 'natural laws' of capitalist society. On the other hand, the very evolution of society, marked by the upsurge of the revolutionary proletarian class, heralds the decadence of the old bourgeois materialism, which becomes more and more imbued with mysticism, expressing the pessimism and scepticism of a decomposing bourgeois class:

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<sup>128</sup> Pannekoek 1970, p. 54.

<sup>129</sup> Pannekoek 1970, p. 63.

<sup>130</sup> Pannekoek 1970, p. 61.

<sup>131</sup> Pannekoek 1970, p. 57.

As soon as the proletarian class-struggle revealed more and more that capitalism was not capable of resolving the vital problems of the masses, materialist philosophy ceased to be sure of itself and disappeared ... The bourgeoisie gave itself up to all sorts of religious beliefs and ... bourgeois philosophers and intellectuals succumbed to the influence of mystical tendencies. Very quickly they discovered the weakness and limitations of materialist philosophy and began to speechify about the 'limits' of the sciences and the 'insoluble enigmas' of the universe.<sup>132</sup>

Such analysis was already a classic position of the Marxist movement, especially of Pannekoek himself, before 1914 (see Chapter Two).

Inspired by Dietzgen, 'an integral, even essential component of Marxism',<sup>133</sup> he stressed the indissoluble unity and interaction between spiritual phenomena (thought) and material phenomena (the totality of the world). Against idealism and empiricism, he reaffirmed the Marxist conception that spiritual and material phenomena – that is, matter and mind together – constitute the real world in an integral way; it is a cohesive entity in which matter 'determines' mind, whilst mind, through the intermediary of human activity, 'determines' matter. The world is an integral unity in which each part only exists as part of the whole and is entirely determined by the action of the latter: 'Mind ... is part of the totality of the universe and its nature lies in the unity of its relations with the totality of the world.'<sup>134</sup>

What is remarkable in Pannekoek's book, at a time when – in the trail of Bogdanov and Bukharin<sup>135</sup> – Marxism was being reduced to the level of 'proletarian science' and 'sociology', is the definition of Marxism itself. Historical materialism is not a 'science of nature', but a 'science of society' linked to the proletarian class-struggle. Also significant, and showing an evolution in Pannekoek – who had defined Marxism as a 'science' before 1914 – was the fact that his book argues that Marxism 'is more than just a science'.<sup>136</sup> It is first and foremost a vision of the world, from the standpoint of the proletarian revolution. Marxism has its scientific validity in its method. As such, 'it cannot be an immutable doctrine or a sterile dogma imposing its truths'. With his eye on Russian state-philosophy, which denounced relativity as a 'counter-revolutionary

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132 Pannekoek 1970, p. 35.

133 Pannekoek 1970, p. 42.

134 Pannekoek 1970, p. 43.

135 See Bukharin 1971, pp. 9–15, where the 'concepts' of 'proletarian science' and 'Marxist sociology' are upheld.

136 Pannekoek 1970, p. 29.

belief',<sup>137</sup> Pannekoek insists that Marxism, though not a theory of the evolution of nature, is constantly being revolutionised by the appearance of new phenomena in society, in politics and in science; phenomena that 'Marx and Engels were not able to predict or foresee'. Marxism is thus, above all, 'an excellent tool and guide' for explaining new realities; it is 'a living theory whose growth is linked to that of the proletariat and to the tasks and aims of its struggle'.<sup>138</sup>

Nonetheless, the Dutch theoretician's book fails to overcome a certain schematism. In line with the councilist theses on Bolshevism, Pannekoek drew the conclusion, just from reading one book by Lenin, that the Bolsheviks had never been Marxists: 'We cannot reproach Russian Bolshevism for having abandoned Marxism, for the simple reason that it never was Marxist'.<sup>139</sup> Pannekoek's explicit thesis was as follows: Lenin's 'bourgeois materialism', corresponding to the 'feudal' nature of Russia, was the theory of the 'Russian bourgeois revolution' and of state-capitalism. Like the French bourgeoisie of 1789, the Bolsheviks used anti-religious ideology to carry through this 'bourgeois revolution'. This ideology had been necessary to the rising bourgeoisie. Lenin's vulgar materialism had its social base in the 'new class' of intellectuals, the bearers of state-capitalism and a 'new ruling class'. And Pannekoek concluded that 'Leninism is the theory of a bourgeois revolution installing a new ruling class in power'.<sup>140</sup> Finally, Lenin's book contained the fatal seeds of the Stalinist counter-revolution. According to Pannekoek, if one had read *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* before 1914 'one would have been able to predict that the Russian Revolution would lead, in one way or another, to a form of capitalism based on the workers' struggle'.<sup>141</sup>

Behind these assertions lie some astounding silences on Pannekoek's *Weltanschauung*. They also express implicitly a 'spontaneous' philosophy of council-communism in this period.

- a) First of all, Pannekoek remains silent about the politics of the Bolsheviks, who were on the left wing of the Second International, against war and for revolution. Pannekoek was unaware of the internal struggles within the RSDLP and the Bolshevik party when he asserts that Lenin 'makes no allusion to the bourgeoisie's spiritual power over the workers'.<sup>142</sup> Lenin's

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<sup>137</sup> Pannekoek 1970, p. 89.

<sup>138</sup> Pannekoek 1970, p. 29.

<sup>139</sup> Pannekoek 1970, p. 103.

<sup>140</sup> Pannekoek 1970, p. 113.

<sup>141</sup> Pannekoek 1970, p. 103.

<sup>142</sup> Pannekoek 1970, p. 107.

book *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* was, above all, an affirmation that the struggle of a Marxist party took place in all fields, political as well as philosophical, including the fight against the idealist and even religious conceptions upheld by bourgeois society. Even before 1914, Lenin's writings express an incessant struggle against democratic, nationalist and imperialist ideologies.

- b) Secondly, Pannekoek ignored the circumstances in which Lenin's book was written, and what was at stake in the Bolshevik party. It was a question of preserving the party from the penetration of the idealist and religious conceptions expressed by Bogdanov and Lunacharsky. Lenin's struggle was, above all, a political struggle directed against certain 'liquidationist' tendencies in the RSDLP. Nor was the struggle that Lenin undertook against religion limited to Russia or the Bolshevik party. In the more developed countries, it was undertaken by the left in the major Social-Democratic parties, which fought against the official view that 'religion was a private matter'. This struggle did not have the same extent because the proletariat in these countries had a better socialist education and was less subjected to religion, which had begun to go into decline. But there is no doubt that Pannekoek, who before 1914 considered that 'religion will disappear with the beginning of the proletarian revolution',<sup>143</sup> expressed in his book an underestimation of the ideological struggle that Marxism had to wage against religion, as against bourgeois ideology in general.<sup>144</sup> This underestimation by Pannekoek also seems to contradict his statement – in *Lenin as Philosopher* – that the decline of capitalism is accompanied by a new upsurge of mysticism. But Pannekoek only sees this influencing the bourgeoisie – the proletariat apparently being miraculously protected from it.
- c) The 'vulgar-materialist' conceptions he criticised in Lenin were not limited to the latter. They were quite widely held among the main theoreticians of the Second International, Kautsky and Plekhanov – the latter having an international audience beyond the borders of Russia. We may recall that up to 1914, on the theoretical level, Lenin defined himself as a faithful follower of Kautsky. The deformation of Marxism was already an old phenomenon in the Second International. Even before it was founded, Marx, fearing the deformation of the historical-materialist method, said that he was 'no Marxist'. Many of the fundamental texts of historical materialism, which had been left in the care of Bernstein and Kautsky, remained no more

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143 Pannekoek 1970, p. 40.

144 For example in Kautsky 1955.

than long-forgotten manuscripts. It was the work of the Russian Riazanov after the Russian Revolution that first brought several unpublished texts by Marx to light.<sup>145</sup> It is also striking that the Russian Revolution was at the origin of some of the most significant Marxist writings of the time: *History and Class Consciousness* by Lukács, *Marxism and Philosophy* by Korsch, and so on.

- d) Pannekoek also seemed unaware of the heterogeneity and the actual development of the political and theoretical conceptions within the Russian revolutionary movement. Lenin himself did not represent the whole of Bolshevism. Militants like Bukharin and Radek – the latter up to 1919 – were very close to the conceptions of the Dutch left on the national question. In 1918 Bukharin and Osinski represented a tendency that underlined the danger of state-capitalism. The evolution of Lenin himself was characteristic: at first he was a partisan of the ‘democratic revolution’, namely, a bourgeois revolution led by the workers and peasants, then in 1917 he rallied to Trotsky’s position on the ‘permanent revolution’, which was in fact Marx’s position in 1852. This meant rejecting any idea of ‘bourgeois revolutions’ in the ‘epoch of wars and revolutions’. The question was in fact different, namely if the ‘democratic revolution’ would be replaced by a simple party-dictatorship in the economic form of state-capitalism.
- e) Pannekoek’s claim that Lenin was never a Marxist was unfounded. An analysis of Lenin’s texts on Marx and Marxism clearly shows that the Bolshevik leader had read Marx attentively and had thoroughly assimilated the method of historical materialism.<sup>146</sup> It was Lenin himself, through studying the texts of Marx, Engels – and Pannekoek! – who made the best synthesis of the Marxist position on the state, in his book *State and Revolution*. This book, which was translated into Dutch by Gorter, was hailed by the Dutch communist left in 1918 as a ‘restoration of Marxism’. If Lenin, like many other Marxists of his time, was still marked by the old bourgeois materialism at a philosophical level, the same was not true at the theoretical and political level. Even in the field of philosophy, Lenin, who admitted he was no expert in the field, was far from being influenced solely by eighteenth-century bourgeois materialism. His commentaries on Hegel and Dietzgen<sup>147</sup> – whose

<sup>145</sup> ‘Communication sur l’héritage littéraire de Marx et Engels’ in Riazanov 1968.

<sup>146</sup> Lenin 1962b; 1964b.

<sup>147</sup> See Lenin 1972b. Unlike Plekhanov and Mehring who rejected Dietzgen’s contribution, Lenin argued that ‘On the whole Dietzgen does not merit such a categorical blame. He was nine-tenths a materialist, who never laid claim to originality or a particular philosophy different from materialism’ (Lenin 1972c).

contribution he appreciated, like Pannekoek and unlike Plekhanov – show a certain evolution, a deepening of Marxist materialism. This is why Pannekoek's critique of *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* on its own is so one-sided.

- f) The 'philosophical sources' of Stalinism that Pannekoek believed he had found in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* are more readily found in the works of Lenin's adversary, Bogdanov, than in those of the Bolshevik leader. First, the supposed contrast between 'bourgeois' and 'proletarian' sciences, rejected by Lenin to some degree, anticipated the worst excesses of Zhdanovism. Secondly, by reducing all relations of production to 'purely technical relations of the organisation of labour', Bogdanov prefigured Stalin's view that 'technique determines everything'. Even the 'proletarian culture' (*proletkult*) defended by Bogdanov – most of whose representatives fell victim to Stalinist repression – made some contribution to the edification of Stalinist ideology in the 1930s. But just as Lenin's philosophical positions cannot be grafted onto his political positions, so Bogdanov cannot be assimilated with Stalinism politically. Bogdanov was one of the founders of the 'Workers' Truth' (*Rabotchaya Pravda*) opposition-group in 1921, a group which fought vigorously against Stalinism and the 'degeneration of the Russian Revolution'.<sup>148</sup>
- g) Pannekoek undoubtedly made a mechanical link between theoretical assimilation of the bases of Marxism and revolutionary praxis. His argumentation does not begin to explain why the greatest exponents of Marxism, confirmed dialecticians like Plekhanov and Kautsky, turned away from the workers' revolution and fought against it in 1917 and 1918. And, inversely, why elements influenced by modern idealist philosophy – that of Bergson for the revolutionary syndicalists, and of Croce for Gramsci – could find themselves in the revolutionary camp after 1917, despite all their 'philosophical' confusion and eclecticism. By situating himself outside of any historical context, Pannekoek failed to understand a major phenomenon of the revolutionary workers' movement: the constant difficulty of assimilating not only historical-materialist theory, but also the scientific knowledge

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148 Formed in 1921 by Bogdanov's co-thinkers, *Rabotchaya Pravda* ('Workers' Truth') was active up until 1923. It took part in the wildcat-strikes which broke out in Russia in the summer of 1923. Condemning the NEP and the unions as instruments of 'state-capital', this group had similarities with councilist theories: definition of the Russian Communist Party as 'the party of the administrative intelligentsia'; characterisation of the October Revolution as a 'phase of capitalist development'. *Rabotchaya Pravda* called for the formation of a 'new workers' party'. See Daniels 1969.

of the day, which explains the slow development of a socialist synthesis in all areas (social, political, economic, scientific, cultural). He also leaves out the fact that in the revolutionary movement of his time, there were no more 'great thinkers' like Marx, capable of synthesising all the new knowledge elaborated in capitalist society; and that, consequently, Marxism, in its political form of praxis, is disseminated collectively in the mass of revolutionary militants, without all of them having assimilated all its theoretical bases. In fact, politics becomes the 'specialisation' of these militants. Pannekoek who, after 1921, was more a theoretician than one of these militants, expressed in a striking manner a reality of the workers' movement: very often Marxist theoreticians like Pannekoek could make a profound analysis of the social and scientific developments of their time, while being essentially outside the real movement, observers rather than actors. It can thus occur that theoreticians of the workers' movement, whose studies can be so profound, find themselves in contradiction with, even in opposition to, the real revolutionary movement. This was the case with Kautsky. The inverse is also true: theoreticians whose Marxist bases seem incomplete, vague or imbued with pre-Marxist concepts, can be fully attuned to the real movement.

Pannekoek's book was revelatory of council-communism's 'philosophy'. If we remove the profound Marxist philosophical critique of Lenin's bourgeois materialism, *Lenin as Philosopher* exposed the contradictions of the 'councilist' movement. Pannekoek himself expressed in a striking manner the separation between scientist and militant. In council-communism, there was undoubtedly a separation between the theoretical struggle and the practical combat. An 'economistic' vision in practice could perfectly well co-exist with a 'pure' theory.

But essentially, this book revealed a growing tendency in the councilist movement, including Mattick in the USA, to consider political activity purely from a theoretical angle. The praxis of Marxism, seen as an 'organised militant-activity', was relegated to second place. More and more, the council-communists presented themselves as Marxist 'thinkers', as pedagogues of socialism like Otto Rühle. Ben Sijes later recognised that for him, an autodidact, the GIC had been a 'university'. Their goal was to 'enlighten the proletariat', and not to act within it, for fear of imposing a political line on it. The class-struggle was portrayed in an ideological form, as a struggle of ideas. The proletariat had to free itself from 'modern superstitions', from 'idols' like the state and the nation, and from 'spiritual powers' like democracy, unions and parties. For this it was necessary that 'workers themselves, collectively and individually, act



and decide, and thus educate themselves and form their own opinions'.<sup>149</sup> In the council-communist conception, Marxism appears less as praxis than as an ethic to be realised in the future. The 'philosophy' of council-communism was a striking mixture of historical materialism in 'pure theory' and ethical idealism in practice.

Finally, on the political level, in line with the *Theses on Bolshevism*, Pannekoek seemed to display a tendency to conciliation with the new left-socialism. The theory that the politics of Bolshevism could only lead to the 'bourgeois revolution' in Russia had already been defended by Kautsky in 1922.<sup>150</sup> The search for a conciliation between council-communism and 'new left-socialism', already evident in the *Rote Kämpfer* group, continued after the Second World-War, especially in Germany. Nevertheless, these 'linkages' were superficial and cannot hide a deep antagonism with social democracy, as with Stalinism and the various currents resulting from Leninism, such as Trotskyism.

'Anti-Leninism' was the cement of the council-communist groups, their political and philosophical basis.<sup>151</sup> 'Anti-Leninism', a reaction to the course of the state-capitalist counter-revolution in Russia and Europe, was inseparable from the anti-organisational theories of 'councilism'. Nevertheless, these reactions can, in part, explain the ultimate disappearance of the GIC – and also of Mattick's group in the USA – at the beginning of the Second World-War. The GIC's forces were able to survive politically by joining the *Communistenbond Spartacus*. (See Chapter Eleven)

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149 Pannekoek 1970, p. 109.

150 See Kautsky 1922 '... Russia is essentially at the stage of the bourgeois revolution ... the West has its bourgeois revolutions behind it and proletarian revolutions before it ... Russia, by contrast, was so backward that it still had to go through the bourgeois revolution, the tail of absolutism'.

151 Paradoxically, the council-communists laid claim to a strict 'Leninism' when it came to rejecting the economic theses of Rosa Luxemburg in *The Accumulation of Capital*. See Paul Mattick, 'Die Gegensätze zwischen Luxemburg und Lenin' (The differences of principle between Rosa Luxemburg and Lenin), *Rätekorrespondenz*, No. 12, September 1935. For him, Luxemburg's economic theory was one that 'Lenin was right to qualify as erroneous and foreign to Marxism'.

## Towards State-Capitalism: Fascism, Anti-Fascism, Democracy, Stalinism, Popular Fronts and the 'Inevitable War' (1933–9)

In 1933 a major debate developed in the international council-communist movement, aimed at determining what course historical events were taking. Was the global economic crisis just a passing phenomenon, or a lasting one? Would economic collapse inevitably lead to a new wave of revolutionary struggles, or, on the contrary, to the consolidation of capitalism in a totalitarian form? Would fascism collapse, or grow stronger? Was the fascist phenomenon limited to a few particular countries, or was it a universal expression of the decadent capitalist mode of production? Was there a general tendency towards state-capitalism, of which fascism and Stalinism were particular expressions? Was 'classical' democracy a different form of state-capitalism, and was it progressive in relation to fascism? Or should the proletariat fight against it, just as it had to fight against Stalinism and fascism? What should be the attitude of the council-communist movement towards the popular fronts and anti-fascism?

These were the burning political questions that obliged the GIC to go beyond the general debates it had been having for years on the unions and workers' councils. The responses to these questions from the Dutch and German lefts or from Mattick's group were not fundamentally different to those given by the Italian communist left around *Bilan*.<sup>1</sup> But, given the fragmentation and isolation of the communist left's various components, this identity of political and theoretical standpoints rarely gave rise to any joint statements of position. In a tragic period, the different internationalist groups found themselves in a tragic state of political isolation.

### 1 The Theories of Capitalist Collapse

Up until 1932–3, when the GIC published a pamphlet specifically devoted to the economic crisis, the Dutch groups had only dealt with crisis theory in

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1 The view of the Italian communist left was based on the experience of the Russian Revolution and on the theory of the decadence of capitalism.

passing.<sup>2</sup> But when the GIC was drawn into a polemic with the German and American council-communists, it began to place this question at the centre of its intervention.<sup>3</sup> After 1932, each issue of the *Persdienst* (*PIC*)<sup>4</sup> defined its objective as follows:

The development of capitalism leads to increasingly more violent crises which are expressed by increasingly higher unemployment and an increasingly greater dislocation of the productive apparatus, such that millions of workers are put out of work and threatened by starvation. Furthermore, the antagonisms between the different capitalist states are sharpening to the point where economic war will lead to a new world-war. The growing uncertainty of its survival is compelling the working class to fight for a communist mode of production ...<sup>5</sup>

It is worth noting that the line as to the inevitability of world-war was soon withdrawn. Convinced that war was inevitable, especially after 1935, the GIC nonetheless refused to succumb to a fatalistic vision, as long as the resources of the working class had not been exhausted. This conception, which relied on the factor of will in the class-struggle, appeared in the GIC's economic theory, which rejected the idea of an 'automatic' collapse of capitalism leading no less 'automatically' to revolution. Here the GIC rejected certain 'fatalistic' interpretations which had grown up amongst the German communist left, but also rejected Rosa Luxemburg's conception of the decadence of capitalism.

### 1.1 *Theoretical Differences in the Council-Communist Movement*

It is highly significant that the GIC rejected the theory of capitalism's 'mortal crisis', which had been the cornerstone of the whole German left-communist movement. Here, it was simply following Pannekoek, who had from the outset criticised Rosa Luxemburg's theory set out in *The Accumulation of Capi-*

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<sup>2</sup> Sijes 1932.

<sup>3</sup> 'De economische crisis', *PIC*, No. 23, October 1929.

<sup>4</sup> Before 1932, the titles of the GIC's periodical was *Persmateriaal* ('Press-Material') of the Internationalist Communists (*PIC*); the title then changed to *Persdienst* ('Press-Service'). These politically very 'neutral' titles indicated the activity of a discussion-circle, rather than of a political group. *PIC* was distributed free of charge, supported by voluntary contributions from militants and readers. This changed in 1938 with the publication of *Radencommunisme*: the periodical was sold. This had been the case with *Räte-Korrespondenz* since 1934.

<sup>5</sup> *PIC*, No. 18, November 1932. The paragraph on the inevitability of war only appeared in this issue and was cut out in the next one, without the slightest explanation.

tal.<sup>6</sup> In the Netherlands, only the *Arbeidersraad* group continued to defend the 'Luxemburgist' conception that had formerly been shared by the whole Essen tendency.<sup>7</sup> In Germany, the council-communist movement remained faithful to Luxemburg's theses.

In 1933, a lively discussion began in the international council-communist movement, where Henryk Grossmann's theses had begun to wield considerable influence. Grossmann was a German Social-Democratic economist who believed that the inevitability of capitalism's collapse could be demonstrated solely by referring to Marx's theoretical schemas of the enlarged reproduction of capital. Using these schemas, Grossmann claimed to be able to show why Rosa Luxemburg's theory was wrong. The crisis of capital was not due to the saturation of the market and the impossibility of realising surplus-value in solvent markets, but to the tendency for the rate of profit to fall. The cause of crises lay not in the sphere of capital-circulation, but solely in the sphere of accumulation. Capitalism's major problem was an excessive accumulation of constant capital and thus an insufficiency of surplus-value. The growth of constant capital was too great and too rapid in relation to that of surplus-value. Thus, whereas Marx talked about overaccumulation bringing about the crisis, of an excess of surplus-value that could not find a field for investment, Grossmann saw the origin of the world-crisis in a growing insufficiency of surplus-value, in a scarcity of capital that no longer allowed a sufficient rate of accumulation. The fall in this rate led to a fall in production, and consequently a fall in the mass of surplus-value. It followed, through a purely economic, indeed almost mathematical process, that capitalism would collapse. The system would enter its 'final' crisis.<sup>8</sup> In a somewhat abstract and fatalistic manner, Grossmann elaborated a theoretical schema of a cycle of crisis every thirty-five years, culminating with the 'mortal crisis'.

Grossmann's theses had a major echo in the Dutch and American lefts. As early as 1930, the GIC had said that Grossmann's ideas were 'remarkable';<sup>9</sup> and it is undeniable that a strong minority of the Dutch group were fascinated by the idea that the development of capitalism leads to increasingly violent crises, expressed in ever-growing unemployment and a greater and greater dislocation of the productive apparatus, such that millions of workers find themselves cast

6 In 1913 Pannekoek violently criticised Luxemburg's theory in *Die Neue Zeit*, a critique he took up again in 1933 in *Proletarier*, No. 1, 'Die Zusammenbruchstheorie des Kapitalismus' (unsigned).

7 'Wereldcrisis. Wereldrevolutie', in *De Arbeidersraad*, Nos. 8–9, August and September 1935.

8 A summary of Grossmann's major book can be found in Duret 1992.

9 'Een merkwaardig boek', *PIC*, No. 1, January 1930.

aside by a 'final crisis'. It thus adopted its own version of the thesis of a 'mortal crisis of capitalism' that had been defended within the German left, above all by the Essen tendency.<sup>10</sup> Rejecting Luxemburg's explanation regarding the saturation of the market, it saw the falling rate of profit as the sole cause of the crisis.<sup>11</sup>

The American council-communists around Mattick in Chicago tried to reconcile the theory of the 'mortal crisis' with Grossmann's ideas. In 1933, Mattick wrote the programme of the IWW, which adopted the 'Grossmannite' conception.<sup>12</sup> But, unlike Grossmann, he drew revolutionary conclusions from it.<sup>13</sup>

The world-crisis was not a cyclical crisis, but the 'mortal crisis of capitalism' posing the 'alternative: communism or barbarism'. Like the KAPD in the 1920s, Mattick declared forcefully that capitalism had entered its 'decadent phase' marked by 'the general, absolute and continuous pauperisation of the proletariat'.<sup>14</sup>

The crisis of capitalism had become permanent.<sup>15</sup> However, Mattick did not conclude from this that the revolution was inevitable. It depended on the revolutionary consciousness of the proletariat. The crisis merely created the objective conditions for revolution: 'The mortal crisis of capitalism means only that the objective conditions for the proletarian revolution have been laid down. For the proletariat, there is only one way out of the crisis, the road that leads to the disappearance of the capitalist system'. And Mattick added that 'in the period of capitalist decadence' every strike has 'a truly revolutionary significance'. The question was whether the strikes that broke out in the 1930s were necessarily revolutionary, in the absence of the proletariat's revolutionary consciousness.

## 1.2 *Crisis-Theory According to Pannekoek and the GIC*

In reaction to Grossmann's conceptions, which had been adopted by Mattick and a part of the GIC, Pannekoek published a text on 'The Theory of Capitalist

10 See 'Die Akkumulation des Kapitals', *Proletarier*, Berlin, 1923.

11 See Sijes 1932.

12 'Programm der Industriearbeiter der Welt', in Korsch–Mattick–Pannekoek 1973.

13 For Grossmann, the class-struggle was reduced to the struggle for wages and working-hours.

14 'Programm der Industriearbeiter der Welt', in Korsch–Mattick–Pannekoek 1973.

15 The idea of a permanent crisis of capitalism since 1914, much clearer than the GIC's economic theory, was elaborated by Mattick 'The permanent crisis', in *International Council Correspondence* No. 2, November 1934.

Collapse'.<sup>16</sup> Pannekoek's aim was to combat, as a Marxist, any idea of an automatic collapse of capitalism, and thus of a 'spontaneous' outbreak of revolution. Capitalism's collapse was not just economic, it was also social. Without the conscious intervention of the proletariat, in struggle against the effects of this collapse, one could not really talk about a real collapse of the system, which is situated above all on the political terrain: 'It is not because capitalism collapses economically and because men – workers and others – are pushed by necessity to create a new order, that socialism appears. On the contrary: capitalism, as it lives and grows, becomes more and more intolerable for the workers, pushing them to struggle continually, until they develop the strength and will to overthrow the rule of capitalism and build a new order – and that is when capitalism crumbles.'<sup>17</sup>

To separate the objective conditions (crises) from the subjective ones (consciousness and organisation), was to fail to understand that the collapse of capitalism is an economic, political and social unity: 'The accumulation of capital, crises, pauperisation, the proletarian revolution, the taking of power by the working class, all this is an indivisible unity operating like the laws of nature. And it is this unity which leads to the collapse of capitalism'.<sup>18</sup>

Thus, for fear of falling into a fatalistic vision of revolution, and of underestimating the factor of consciousness as a decisive element in the collapse of capitalism, Pannekoek and the GIC rejected, not without reason, the ambiguous idea of a mortal crisis: 'Only the workers can transform this crisis into a mortal crisis'.<sup>19</sup>

But in rejecting the somewhat fatalistic conceptions of Grossmann and Mattick, the GIC abandoned the entire heritage of the German left's crisis-theory. The crisis of 1929 was seen not as a generalised crisis expressing the decline of the capitalist system, but as a cyclical crisis. In a pamphlet published in 1933, the GIC asserted that the Great Crisis was 'chronic' rather than permanent, even after 1914.<sup>20</sup> Capitalism was like the legendary phoenix, endlessly reborn from its own ashes. After each 'regeneration' through crisis, capitalism reappeared 'greater and more powerful than ever'.<sup>21</sup> But this 'regeneration' was not eternal, since 'the flames threaten the whole of social life with an increasingly viol-

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16 Pannekoek, 'Die Zusammenbruchstheorie des Kapitalismus', *Räte-Korrespondenz* No. 1, June 1934.

17 French translation in Authier and Barrot (eds.) 1976, pp. 342–61.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid.

20 Sijes 1932.

21 Sijes 1932, p. 19.

ent death'. Finally, only the proletariat could give the capitalist phoenix the 'death blow'<sup>22</sup> and transform a cycle of crisis into a final crisis. This theory was thus contradictory, since, on the one hand, it was a vision of cyclical crises as in the nineteenth century, with capitalism constantly expanding, in permanent ascendancy; on the other hand, it described a cycle of increasingly lethal destruction and reconstruction.

The GIC's contradictions on the nature of crises in the twentieth century lay in its explanations of their causes. For the GIC, the crisis of 1929 was not a crisis of overproduction, caused by the shrinking of the capitalist market, but a crisis of 'profitability' in the sphere of accumulation. Overproduction was a phenomenon resulting from the fall in capitalism's profits; it was 'not the cause of the crisis',<sup>23</sup> but its consequence, when – due to an insufficient return on capital – accumulation ceased expanding. This explanation, which denied the problem of the market, had much in common with Grossmann's theories: the GIC simply rejected their political implications. The GIC's hesitations in the domain of crisis theory had consequences in the political domain. Convinced that the revolution was not a merely economic question, but a question of consciousness and will, after 1933 it sought to define the essential political positions of the council-communist movement.

## 2 Fascism and Anti-Fascism

After 1933 it became clear that fascism was not just a local phenomenon, limited to one country like Italy. It was not restricted to the countries defeated in the First World-War, or to backward, largely agricultural countries. It had taken power in a big industrialised country like Germany and was growing in others, like Britain and France, which had been the victors in the war. The Netherlands, a 'neutral' country, had also seen fascism grow after 1932: the NSB, headed by Jan Baars and Anton Mussert developed rapidly in a country hit hard by unemployment.

The positions adopted by the Dutch left on democracy and anti-fascism were not very different from those of the German and Italian lefts.

The Dutch council-communists energetically refused to consider democracy as a lesser evil than fascist dictatorship. From the proletarian point of view, there was no difference between democracy and fascism: they were both

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<sup>22</sup> Sijes 1932.

<sup>23</sup> Sijes 1932, p. 26.

different methods for imposing the bourgeoisie's dictatorship over the proletariat. While the fascist régime was based on terror, the 'democratic' régime was the bourgeoisie's best weapon for derailing the class-struggle:

If the proletariat in the 'democratic' countries really enters into movement, it then finds the whole of bourgeois power turned against it. In this respect there is not the slightest difference between 'democracy' and fascism, whatever the state-form. 'Democracy' is even, in some ways, a more effective weapon for the bourgeoisie than naked state-violence, since it makes it possible to use particular demands to derail a rising movement. When dictatorial governments can no longer repress a mounting revolutionary movement, the bourgeoisie often resorts to 'democracy' as we saw in Russia in February 1917 and Germany in November 1918 ... as soon as a revolutionary movement breaks out, the fascist enemy is no more dangerous than the 'democratic' enemy.<sup>24</sup>

For this reason, the workers had to reject the slogan 'defend democratic rights' raised by the left-parties and Trotskyist groups. This was not just an illusion, but a bourgeois mystification aimed at preventing workers from fighting against the capitalist order, whether 'fascist' or 'democratic'. The duty of the proletariat was, therefore, to fight, not just against a particular form of capitalism, but against all its political expressions, right and left:

The workers have never possessed such political rights. Political rights have only been accorded when the big workers' organisations have given their assurance that they would not be abused ... The rights that workers can use within the recognised workers' organisations only serve to integrate the workers into the democratic order ... The workers always and everywhere must fight against capitalism, and it makes little difference whether it uses democratic or fascist forms of government. Whether under fascism or democracy, the wage-labourers are exploited by capital.<sup>25</sup>

The GIC and the Dutch council-communists showed that fascism and democracy were two complementary methods of capitalist government, adapted to

<sup>24</sup> 'Fascisme en arbeidersklasse', *PIC*, No. 7, July 1935, p. 6.

<sup>25</sup> 'Klassenkampf im Kriege', *Räte-Korrespondenz*, No. 14, December 1935.



the social and economic situation.<sup>26</sup> Democracy prepared the crushing of the proletariat; fascism finished off the job. Fascism was ‘... to a large extent, the consequence of the bankruptcy of the Second and Third Internationals’.<sup>27</sup> It was the general crisis of capitalism that allowed fascism to come to power, drawing its support from the middle-classes.

In fact, from the capitalist point of view, fascism was far better adapted to the situation of global economic crisis. It was part of the general tendency towards state-capitalism (see below). ‘Democracy’ could not escape this tendency towards the concentration of the economy in the hands of the state. The phenomenon of totalitarianism, both on the economic and political level, had put an end to classical liberal democracy; the latter corresponded to the phase of ‘youthful capitalism’ (*jong-kapitalistisch*), when Parliament had been the ‘meeting-place for opposing interests within the ruling class’.<sup>28</sup> The unity of the bourgeoisie, which had reached the stage of monopoly capital, was forged not only in the face of the revolutionary danger, as Pannekoek and Gorter had said in the 1920s, but also in periods of open crisis. Contrary to the German council-communists, who saw Nazism as a circumstantial, passing phenomenon, the Dutch saw it as the expression of a new period of capitalism.<sup>29</sup> In the highly developed countries, there had been a progressive evolution from ‘democracy’ to the totalitarian Nazi-fascist system. The concentration of capital in the hands of the state, the suppression of ‘freedoms’ and the introduction of a totalitarian

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26 The councilist group in The Hague, which published *De Radencommunist* in 1933, the councilist group *Discussie* that began in 1934, the ‘working-group’ which published the *Spartacus* newsletter from 1937 onwards; the *Proletenstemmen* working-group, named after its agitational newsletter and linked to the GIC: all these groups had the same political positions as the GIC, but without its theoretical coherence. Still less organised, and with less sense of the need for organisation, they were essentially agitation-groups, intervening at factory-gates and unemployment offices as isolated working-class revolutionary elements, not as revolutionary political groups.

27 *PIC*, No. 7, July 1935.

28 ‘Parlementarisme en democratie’, *PIC*, No. 4, March 1934.

29 See *Räte-Korrespondenz*, No. 16/17, May 1936: ‘... our appraisal of the period was that we would have to work for the long term, which meant not so much calling for the direct struggle but clarifying why the old workers’ movement had collapsed without resistance, and tracing the lines of development of a new workers’ movement ... Our conception was not very well-understood at the time, precisely because the German comrades had a different appreciation of the situation. They believed the time had come for mass revolutionary propaganda, their analysis of the situation was expressed in the slogan “now to the masses”’.

system of rule – ‘freedom of thought has more and more become a danger to capitalist society’<sup>30</sup> – signified the death of ‘democracy’: ‘Democracy, as the political structure of youthful capitalism when there were many more small entrepreneurs, is no longer useful in the present situation. It can no longer serve as a meeting-place of opposing interests within the bourgeoisie ... society is becoming more and more ripe for national socialism.’<sup>31</sup>

The GIC noted that this tendency towards totalitarianism imposed itself on all parties, whatever their political colouring, fascist as well as ‘anti-fascist’. There was no significant difference between Nazism and the national socialism of social democracy and Stalinism. The proletariat had to wage a determined struggle against anti-fascist ideology which, like fascism, was part of the active preparation for world-war. Anti-fascism was not only a way of binding the workers to the state in the democratic countries, its ideological function was to prepare the workers for war. It was a lie, because the aim of the ‘democracies’ was not to fight the fascist system. In the preparations for war, the anti-fascists were obliged to copy the methods of fascism:

Coming from today’s patriots, the slogan ‘against fascism’ is a lie. They are not against fascism as such, they are against German fascism and its offspring ... From the first day of the war, there is not one fascist measure that the warring ‘democratic’ capitalists will not take, except one – calling themselves fascist.<sup>32</sup>

However, Dutch council-communism was not homogenous on the question of anti-fascism. One group (the only one), *De Arbeidersraad*, which had come out of the KAPN, increasingly adopted an anti-fascist ideology, which became explicit with the war in Spain (see Chapter Nine). This group had moved closer and closer to Trotskyist positions, since it considered the USSR to be a progressive factor in the ‘anti-fascist struggle’, owing to its planned, ‘non-capitalist’ economy. This group rejected the original positions of the KAPN in the 1920s: ‘The economic policy of the Soviet Union, because it deviates from the “normal” capitalist economy, represents a growing danger for the general capitalist structure. Under the influence of the policy of planning, class-relations in Russia have been considerably changed’.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> *PIC*, No. 4, March 1934.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> GIC pamphlet, September 1938, *De tweede Wereldoorlog, Wanneer?* p. 12.

<sup>33</sup> *De Arbeidersraad*, No. 4, April 1935.

These positions were foreign to council-communism and the GIC reacted strongly against them.<sup>34</sup> They were a justification for anti-fascism; Russia became an 'anti-capitalist factor', a force against fascism. *De Arbeidersraad's* reaction to the GIC's criticisms were symptomatic of an irreversible movement towards the anti-fascist camp. In order to justify itself, *De Arbeidersraad* accused the GIC of being 'under the influence of fascist ideology' and of becoming 'a counter-revolutionary group'.<sup>35</sup> This accusation against the GIC in September 1935 was also directed against the LAO, to which Van der Lubbe had belonged.<sup>36</sup> *De Arbeidersraad*, led by Frits Kief, Abraham and Emmanuel Korper, called for 'the complete annihilation of these groups'. These accusations were akin to the slanders directed at the communist left by the Stalinist parties, and even by certain Trotskyist groups.<sup>37</sup>

It is true that the GIC's views on organisation had political consequences. Since it saw political organisations as an association of discussion-circles, it allowed the expression of opinions, in the form of discussion-articles, that did not necessarily reflect its political positions. This explains why, on the question of fascism, the GIC allowed the publication of a discussion-article that gave *De Arbeidersraad* the chance to declaim about the 'pro-fascist' tendencies in the GIC. An article in *PIC* in 1935, while attacking both fascist and anti-fascist

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34 'Waarheen gaat de Arbeidersraad?', *PIC*, No. 7, July 1935.

This group, as the GIC noted, was moving towards Trotskyism. This was confirmed in 1937: the *Arbeidersraad's* forces all joined either Sneevliet's RSAP or the Trotskyist groups. It is true that Luteraan, former leader of the KAPN, had already followed this trajectory from 1932 onwards, by joining the left-socialist OSP, and then the RSAP in 1935. All these itineraries were typical of the great majority of the KAPN, which came out of the Essen tendency. This phenomenon parallels the evolution of the Essen tendency in Germany, around Schröder and Reichenbach, towards the left-socialist SAP, out of which the *Rote Kämpfer* fraction emerged.

35 Statement by *Arbeidersraad*, 14 August 1935 – Collection of the periodical in Amsterdam, IISG.

36 *De Arbeidersraad*, No. 9, September 1935, pp. 9–10.

37 In 1937, the Mexican Trotskyists accused Eiffel (Paul Kirchhoff, 1900–72, who became a prominent anthropologist in Mexico; had been a member of the KAPD and AAU in Freiburg in 1920–23; a Trotskyist 1930–35; and member of the Marxist Workers' Group, linked to the Italian communist left) of being an agent of the Gestapo and the GPU in Mexico. The Dutch councilist groups opposed such calumnies. In response to the accusations directed against the Dutch Trotskyists by De Visser and De Groot's CPN, the *Spartacus* working-group in The Hague declared: 'There are few Trotskyist workers in Holland. Those that we know are not spies but revolutionary workers who adhere to Trotsky's Bolshevik views. We are not in agreement with this point of view, on a matter of principle' (*Spartacus*, No. 43, 1938).

ideologies, contained the following considerations on the ideology of fascist state-capitalism:<sup>38</sup> according to the author, the negation of individualism by state-capitalism left the field free to a 'collectivist' ideology favourable to communism: 'Fascist and communist ideology both have in common the fact that individual interests are subordinated to collective interests, that men are not fixated on their own petty personality, but are drawn into a wider unity. In this sense we can consider fascism ideologically as a precursor of communism'.

This somewhat tasteless assertion was totally foreign to the positions of the GIC, who declared three years later that:

in our opinion, this is totally false. It is certainly true that both fascism and communism reject bourgeois individualism and refer to collectivities. But such an analogy in no way makes fascism a precursor to communism.<sup>39</sup>

The GIC emphasised that 'this discussion-article in no way reflected the GIC's opinion'. But in affirming that everyone had the right to their opinion, in a spirit of pure democracy, it made room for ambiguities that were exploited by its political adversaries.

### 3 The Question of State-Capitalism

The generalised crisis of the world-economy obliged states to take measures of planning and nationalisation that, apart from the period of the First World-War, had not been seen before in developed capitalism. Hitherto, only the Russian state had adopted such measures, subjecting the entire economy to state-control and suppressing the private sector. After 1933, in the major liberal capitalist countries, the state began to intervene more and more in economic life, controlling or even nationalising key sectors. In Nazi Germany, although the private sector was not suppressed, it came under state-control. A form of state-capitalism was installed that could accommodate itself quite easily to the existence of a private sector. In countries like France and Belgium, the Communist Parties openly advocated the Russian model, but the left-wing political parties, especially the 'left-socialists', extolled the virtues of a 'planned economy', and 'state-socialism'.<sup>40</sup>

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38 'Fascisme en Arbeidersklasse', *PIC*, No. 7, July 1935.

39 *PIC*, No. 3, May 1938, pp. 15–20.

40 The De Man plan in Belgium was characteristic of the 'planning'-tendency, which could also be seen with the SDAP in Holland.

The phenomenon of state-capitalism had been analysed as early as 1918 by the left-communists in Russia. The left of the Bolshevik party around Osinski had warned of the danger of equating state-capitalism with socialism.<sup>41</sup> From the 1920s, the German and Dutch lefts had argued that the Russian economy was a form of state-capitalism, which had nothing to do with socialism. Because of the existence of wage-labour, where the workers were subjected to a state-boss that carried out the accumulation of national capital, the Russian state was capitalist, albeit in a new form. For lack of other examples, the communist left did not inquire as to whether Russian state-capitalism expressed a general, irreversible, trend in world-capitalism.

One of the first theoreticians of council-communism to investigate the phenomenon of state-capitalism in more depth was Otto Rühle. In a remarkable, pioneering book, published in 1931 in Berlin under the pseudonym Carl Steuernmann,<sup>42</sup> Rühle showed that the tendency towards state-capitalism was irreversible and that no country could escape from it, because of the worldwide nature of the crisis. The path taken by capitalism was not a change of nature, but of form, aimed at ensuring its survival as a system: 'The formula for salvation for the capitalist world today is: changing its form, changing its managers and renewing its facade, without renouncing its goal, which is profit. It is a question of looking for a way that will allow capitalism to continue on another level, on another field of development.'<sup>43</sup>

Rühle envisaged roughly three forms of state-capitalism, corresponding to different levels of capitalist development. Because of its economic backwardness, Russia represented the extreme form of state-capitalism: 'the planned economy was introduced in Russia before the free capitalist economy had reached its zenith, before its vital processes had led to its senility'.<sup>44</sup> In the Russian case, the private sector was totally controlled and absorbed by the state. At the other extreme, in a more developed capitalist economy, like Germany, the opposite had happened: private capital had seized control of the state. But the result was identical – the strengthening of state-capitalism: 'There is a third way of arriving at state-capitalism. Not through the usurping of capital by the

41 N. Osinski, 'Stroitelstvo socialisma' ('On the building of Socialism'), *Kommunist*, Nos. 1–2, April 1918. Osinski was the pseudonym of the Soviet economist Valerian Obolensky (1887–1938), who was to be shot by Stalin in 1938.

42 Steuernmann 1932. An extensive view of the theoretical reflections on the nature of Soviet Union in the radical left since the 1920s can be found in Van der Linden 1992.

43 Steuernmann 1932, p. 222.

44 Steuernmann 1932, Chapter Seven, 'The soviets grow up'.

state, but the opposite – private capital grabs hold of the state'.<sup>45</sup> The second 'method', which could be called 'mixed', took place through the state gradually appropriating sectors of private capital: '[The state] conquers a growing influence in entire industries: little-by-little, it becomes master of the economy'.<sup>46</sup>

However, in none of these cases was state-capitalism a 'solution' for capitalism. It could only be a palliative for the crisis of the system: 'State-capitalism is still capitalism ... even in the form of state-capitalism, capitalism cannot hope to prolong its existence for very long. The same difficulties and the same conflicts that oblige it to go from private to state-capitalism reappear on a higher level'.<sup>47</sup> No state-capitalist 'internationalisation' could resolve the problem of the market: 'The suppression of the crisis is not a problem of rationalisation, organisation, production or credit; it is purely and simply a problem of selling'.<sup>48</sup>

Rühle's was a Marxist work of the first order. It nonetheless also contained a number of the ambiguities that were then current in the council-communist movement. In the first place, Rühle, in contradiction with his own analysis, considered state-capitalism to be a 'higher form' of capitalism. On the one hand, it was descending into barbarism; on the other hand, it was regenerating itself in a country like Russia, preparing the way for a worldwide state-capitalism: 'The young collective economy in Russia, with its exuberant vitality and will to conquer, is seeking, once it has incorporated the capitalist culture of the West, to achieve a worldwide planned economy, the economic form of the age of the future'.<sup>49</sup> And Rühle added – moving away from Marxism – that 'this is a state-capitalism tending towards and preparing the way for socialism'. Apart from turning Russian state-capitalism into a 'progressive' phenomenon, he denied the possibility of strictly national state-capitalisms. Although he denied the charge, this vision of an internationally planned capitalism was reminiscent of Hilferding.<sup>50</sup>

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45 Steuermann 1932, p. 231.

46 Steuermann 1932, pp. 229–30.

47 Steuermann 1932, pp. 291–3.

48 Steuermann 1932, p. 249.

49 Steuermann 1932, p. 209.

50 See Chapter Seven, 'State-capitalism'. From pp. 247–8:

'It will be necessary to take measures to create a state-capitalism on a world-scale. These measures will be both political and economic. Small states, governments of "countries" will be abolished. The administration will be reformed, great unions between states will be set up, there will be a single customs-system ... The whole life of the state and the economy will be the object of a grandiose and implacable process of rationalisation.'

The debate on state-capitalism initiated by Rühle in 1931 gave rise to numerous contributions from the various council-communist groups after 1935. The immediate cause was the Copenhagen Conference (8–11 June 1935), the so-called Brussels Conference (see Chapter Seven). This conference, dominated by the German and Danish council-communists, adopted a resolution which, apart from organisational problems, also touched upon theoretical issues. Compared to the serious divergences on the ‘new workers’ movement’, those on the nature of state-capitalism appeared secondary. They were however not without consequences in re-defining the revolutionary organisation in the period of capitalism’s totalitarian domination. Most importantly, the resolution, which was voted unanimously – including the vote of the Dutch delegate Piet van Albada – committed the GIC to defending this same line even though its conception was different from that of the German, Danish and American council-communists.

The resolution declared that the ‘councilist’ movement was unanimous on the question of state-capitalism. Written by Alfred Weiland of the ‘Revolutionary Shop-Stewards’ (*Revolutionäre Obleute*), it reflected the viewpoint of the clandestine German groups. According to them, capitalism as a whole was moving economically towards state-capitalism, and politically towards fascism. The tendency towards the militarisation of society and a one-party dictatorship could be found in all countries. Anticipating Rühle’s theory of ‘world-fascism’,<sup>51</sup> the resolution affirmed that fascism took many forms, and could manifest itself through ‘a party-dictatorship that was Bolshevik, socialist, democratic, bourgeois or nationalist’. This conception of a ‘pan-fascism’ did not help to clarify the general tendency to state-capitalism, which could take the most diverse political forms. Seeing only the common general laws of state-capitalism, the German (but also the Danish and American) council-communists remained blind to the particular reflections of this law in different countries. From this starting point, the capitalist world could only end up with the extreme Nazi or Stalinist forms of state-capitalism. The establishment of a ‘planned’ economy in all countries would lead to ‘the elimination of the anarchy of private capital’.<sup>52</sup> In a very ambiguous way, the Germans claimed that this would represent ‘economic progress vis-à-vis capitalist anarchy’. But, above all, state-capitalism was seen as the antechamber to socialism and no longer as a symbol of the system’s decadence, as the German left had insisted in 1920: ‘the era of state-capitalism

51 Rühle 1971b. Rühle exhibited a visceral anti-Bolshevism, proclaiming that ‘Hitler was the best pupil of Lenin and Stalin’.

52 ‘Die Entwicklung zum Staatskapitalismus’, *Räte-Korrespondenz*, No. 16–17, May 1936 (text from 1935).

is the first historic step towards a socialist social order'.<sup>53</sup> This position was identical to that of Rühle in 1931.

The Germans' conception was vigorously criticised by the Dutch, but also by Mattick's group and by the Danes. In its response, the GIC first correctly stated that for all its planning, state-capitalism could not overcome crises. A capitalism without crises was nonsense. Secondly, it was wrong to see 'the evolution towards the planned economy' as a 'deliberate' phenomenon installed by 'state-violence'.<sup>54</sup> Finally, the GIC saw this evolution not as a product of the decadence of a system obliged to violate its own laws, but as the fruit of a 'natural necessity' – that of the growing concentration of capital.

In a sense, for the GIC the concept of a general tendency towards state-capitalism was a source of confusion. In an article entitled 'State-Capitalism and Dictatorship', Pannekoek argued that the Germans had too much of a tendency to see the evolution of world-capital through the prism of German fascism.<sup>55</sup> For Pannekoek, however, fascism could not be considered an expression of the tendency towards state-capitalism; on the contrary, it was a pure expression of private capital: 'In Germany, big private capital is not subordinated to the state: the Nazi party developed purely as an instrument of the big capital of heavy industry, supported by its subsidies. Big capital is the dominant power in the state ...'<sup>56</sup> According to Pannekoek and the GIC, the only real state-capitalism was Russian capitalism. It was only conceivable in the absence of a real bourgeoisie and as the result of a revolution: 'In Russia, the bourgeoisie was liquidated by the revolution and its power destroyed ... State-capitalism could arise because a powerful bourgeoisie was lacking'. In the end, state-capitalism was seen as the product not of a counter-revolution, but of the class-struggle, and it was 'revolutionary' in the sense that it affected the passage from 'barbarism' to 'developed capitalism'. In this sense, it was a 'special case' whose foundation was more political than economic: '... each case is a particular case; each country has a particular form of political development.'<sup>57</sup>

This rejection of the theory of a general tendency towards state-capitalism outside the special case of Russia was justified by the theoretical blunders of

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53 Ibid, The text concluded: 'Internationally, there is an economic evolution towards state-capitalism; politically, towards fascism, which is its social superstructure.'

54 'Antwort der GIKH', in *Räte-Korrespondenz*, No. 16/17, May 1936.

55 'Staatscapitalisme en dictatuur', in *PTC*, No. 9, June 1936. Text in German by Pannekoek, *Räte-Korrespondenz* No. 16/17, May 1936. Unsigned text representing the GIC's point of view.

56 Ibid.

57 Ibid.



the German council-communists. The GIC wanted to close the door to the conception that 'state-capitalism would everywhere become the most developed form of capitalism' and would thus constitute 'a necessary transition-phase between capitalism and communism'.<sup>58</sup> As Marxists, the GIC condemned *a priori* the idea – developed by *Socialisme ou Barbarie* in the 1950's<sup>59</sup> – that state-capitalism was 'a new system' with a 'new ruling class'. Even in the Russian case, it was not at all a new system. Russian state-capitalism remained a capitalist system in which the new ruling class was only new chronologically, not structurally. Organised in the Russian party – which the GIC, not seeing the discontinuity between Lenin and Stalin, still called 'Bolshevik' – the bureaucracy had taken on 'the same role as the private capitalists in their countries' and had itself become the bourgeoisie.<sup>60</sup>

In this way Pannekoek and the GIC showed that state-capitalism did not constitute a historic 'solution' to the crisis of capitalism. Without using the theory of capitalist decadence, they rallied to Mattick's position that in the era of 'permanent crisis',<sup>61</sup> there could be no rationalisation of capital through state-planning. Paradoxically, this could only reinforce the anarchy of the capitalist system: 'Capitalist "planning" only increases the absence of any plan'.<sup>62</sup>

Thus, as in the analysis of the crisis, there was a lack of homogeneity and cohesion in the council-communist movement on the question of state-capitalism. Faced with a novel phenomenon, the Dutch, like the Germans, groped their way forwards. The differences between the GIC and the German groups were by no means as clear-cut as they may have appeared at first. The Germans were far from defending the idea of a 'new system' that had overcome the contradictions of capitalism. In a more fully elaborated response to the GIC they showed that state-capitalism could only slow down the permanent crisis,

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58 'Antwort der GIKH', in *Räte-Korrespondenz*, No. 16/17, May 1936.

59 The group 'Socialisme ou Barbarie', which published the periodical of the same name after 1949, came out of Trotskyism. Its dominant personality was Cornelius Castoriadis – his pseudonyms were Chaulieu or Cardan or Coudray – who ceased to be a Marxist after the 1960s.

60 'Sowjet-Rußland heute', *Räte-Korrespondenz* No. 20, December 1936.

61 The GIC published Mattick's text on the 'Permanent Crisis' in *IC*, No. 8, August 1935. In No. 9 of August 1935, it criticised the 'mechanical and schematic conceptions' in Mattick's 'Grossmannite' view.

62 P.M. (Paul Mattick), 'Erwiderung der amerikanischen Genossen', *Räte-Korrespondenz*, No. 18/19. Mattick, like the GIC, denied capitalism's evolution towards state-capitalism. This could only be conceived on the Russian model, and required 'a revolutionary overthrow, the suppression of the present possessing class'.

not overcome its basic contradictions. It was not a new system but a phase of evolution: 'In this state-capitalist phase of evolution – which is expressed most clearly in the German and Soviet-Russian conditions – the contradictions of capitalist society have not been overcome, but only displaced, concentrated, openly appearing as a contradiction'.<sup>63</sup>

At the same time, within the GIC Pannekoek himself, who was the most determined opponent of the Germans' theory, paradoxically adopted their conclusions. In an article published in the organ of the American council-communists in 1936, under the pseudonym of John Harper, he admitted that there was a general tendency towards state-capitalism in all countries, after having denied it a few months before. It is true that, for him, this tendency was more political than economic in character, its aim being to prevent the proletarian revolution: 'A development of European and American capitalism in the direction of some form of state-capitalism could show itself to be a way of preventing, counter-acting, or deforming a proletarian revolution'. And Pannekoek added that all the parties, whether fascist, 'communist', or social-democratic aspired 'to a form of state-capitalism or state socialism in which the working class is directed and exploited by the state, by the community of chiefs, directors, functionaries and managers of production'.<sup>64</sup>

Admittedly, like the revolutionary movement as a whole, the council-communists had great difficulty in setting out a coherent and global view of state-capitalism.<sup>65</sup> Some, like the Germans, saw all state-capitalisms as identical, without taking into account differences in their emergence and development. The GIC, on the other hand, had a tendency to see only the specificities, 'special cases' like the Russian model, to the point of refusing to see a general tendency towards state-capitalism in the economic sphere of the developed countries. In fact, the GIC and Pannekoek only recognised the existence of state-capitalism in the political sphere, where totalitarianism and the one-party state were going from victory to victory. But, in this case, the GIC and its

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63 'Anti-kritik der deutschen Genossen', *Räte-Korrespondenz* No. 18/19. The German council-communists concluded that state-capitalism, the expression of a 'latent, persistent crisis', involved the absorption of civil society by the state: 'All the essential functions of society are more and more being taken over by the state-apparatus, which ends up dominating the whole of social life and, as a parasitic body, threatens to smother it entirely'.

64 J.H. ('John Harper'), 'The Role of fascism', *International Council Correspondence*, No. 8, July 1936, pp. 10–16.

65 The question of state-capitalism was raised in *Bilan*, organ of the Italian communist left, above all by Mitchell, then a member of Hennauts' LCI. See our work: Bourrinet 1999.

theoretician gave a purely sociological explanation: for them, state-capitalism, a particular form of capitalist domination, was based on a new middle-class stratum, the 'intellectuals'.<sup>66</sup> The German 'councilists', following Rühle, saw the basis of state-capitalism in the phenomenon of capitalist decadence in which 'all the essential functions of society are more and more absorbed by the state-apparatus, which has ended up dominating the whole of social life'. Their conceptual framework was therefore neither sociological nor purely political, but historical, and much closer to economic reality. But in seeing fascism everywhere, in all countries – from Germany to Russia – they fell into political simplification. The 'state-capitalist foundations of society' could only have one political superstructure, not several. Fascism was this form and, in typical 'councilist' manner, it was mixed up with 'Bolshevism', which Rühle saw as 'Red fascism'.<sup>67</sup>

#### 4 Class-Struggle and the Popular Front: A New Course?

In 1932, in an 'Address to all revolutionary workers', the GIC wrote that 'the epoch of mass-revolutionary movements is fast approaching'.<sup>68</sup> Despite the terrible defeat of the German proletariat in 1933, the GIC maintained this view of a course towards revolution until 1936 at least. All the defeats of the proletariat were seen as so many experiences marking the end of one era and the opening of another, in which the world-proletariat would launch into mass revolutionary action.

With the terrible defeat of the Viennese proletariat in February 1934, the GIC had to bow to the evidence: 'the international working class is on the road of repeated defeats'.<sup>69</sup> The struggles of the Amsterdam workers in the same year, then that of the French workers in 1936, forced the GIC to draw clearer lessons about a whole period of defeats.

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66 'De intellektuele middenstand', article by Pannekoek (unsigned), in *PIC*, No. 4, March 1934. Unlike Pannekoek, Mattick, in a 1934 text published in *International Council Correspondence* (French translation in 1967 by *Informations et Correspondance Ouvrières* (ICO) – 'La dictature des intellectuels'). This showed that the 'intellectual' stratum, like the petty bourgeoisie, had no future and was doomed to lose its social influence.

67 See Rühle 1975.

68 *PIC*, No. 12, August 1932.

69 *Einde en Begin*, *PIC*, No. 7, May 1934.

#### 4.1 *The Struggle of the Amsterdam Unemployed (July 1934)*

The unemployed workers of Amsterdam were undoubtedly the most radical sector of the Dutch proletariat.<sup>70</sup> Obligated to report to the unemployment-offices every day, the unemployed were quickly politicised: the long queues were tailor-made for political discussions and the distribution of the revolutionary press, especially that of the council-communists, whose propaganda did have an echo. From 1932 on, unemployed-‘committees of struggle’ were being formed in Amsterdam; very militant, they soon fell into the hands of the CPH, despite the GIC’s calls to ‘wage the struggle outside of any union or political party’.<sup>71</sup>

The unemployed-movement culminated in July 1934 in a veritable uprising, when the conservative – *Anti-Revolutionaire Partij* – cabinet led by Hendriek Colijn (1869–1944) decided to cut unemployment-benefit. On 4 July, the workers of the Jordaan district of Amsterdam demonstrated spontaneously, without any party- or union-directives, against the government’s measures. In this district, as in the ‘Indonesian quarter’, there was lively resistance against the attacks of the motorised and mounted police. The streets of the Jordaan district were soon covered in barricades and were in the hands of the workers and the unemployed, who, once they had ‘won’, went home. But the next day, the army occupied the district with tanks and machine guns. The repression against the workers ended with seven dead and 200 wounded. Strengthened by this victory, the Dutch government forbade all demonstrations and meetings. Although it had distanced itself from the struggle of the Jordaan workers – seeing only ‘pillage and provocation’<sup>72</sup> – *De Tribune*, organ of the CPH, was banned. The small left-socialist party, the OSP, had several of its leaders arrested, even though one of its fractions, the one around De Kadt, refused to express solidarity with the movement, criticising the ‘adventurism’ of the OSP leadership.

The defeat of the Amsterdam unemployed was a heavy one, since it meant a serious defeat for the proletariat in the Netherlands, which had remained passive. In fact, the struggle of the unemployed was seen as something separate, as a particular category. The unemployed themselves did not attempt to generalise their movement. This corporatism and lack of solidarity between different categories of workers was a real weakness:

70 For a history of the Amsterdam workers’ insurrection in July 1934, see Kielich 1984.

71 *PIC*, No. 4, February 1932.

72 *De Tribune* (supplement), 6 July 1934.

... The working-class forces were still so weak that the workers in struggle did not see the extension of the movement as their own task. The idea was that it was a struggle of the unemployed alone and had to be waged by them alone. In Jordaan and its environs, there are various factories: however, the unemployed made no attempt to draw them into the struggle.<sup>73</sup>

The causes of this defeat were not only subjective, but also objective. The bourgeoisie 'could no longer tolerate the least resistance from the workers'.<sup>74</sup> The only way out for the working class was in mass movements, the extension and generalisation of strikes. But would this be enough to halt the bourgeoisie's offensive against the proletariat, particularly the threat of war? Were the great strikes of summer 1936 in France under the banner of the 'Popular Front', the harbingers of a new period of mass-strikes?

#### 4.2 *The GIC and the Strikes of May–June 1936*

It is symptomatic that the GIC exercised great caution in analysing the wave of strikes in France. Whereas the Mattick group in the USA talked about a decisive defeat for the French proletariat,<sup>75</sup> a pseudo-victory opening the door to a series of defeats and to fascism, the GIC defined June 1936 as a turning point for the international proletariat. The French strikes would either open up a new period of class-struggle, or else they would be 'a last gasp before an even more profound slump' for the proletariat.<sup>76</sup> This prudence about the future was a break from the enthusiasm expressed a year earlier during the Belgian miners' strike when the GIC saw the occupation of the mines and the formation of strike-committees as part of an irreversible process of the rejection of all political parties and unions.<sup>77</sup>

The formation of a 'class-front'<sup>78</sup> meant the decline of the 'old workers' movement', preparing the birth of a 'new workers' movement'. This analysis, which paid scant attention to the international political environment after

73 *Räte-Korrespondenz*, No. 8/9, April–May 1935.

74 *Räte-Korrespondenz*, No. 4, September 1934.

75 'The Defeat in France', *International Council Correspondence*, No. 8, July 1936.

76 'Massenstreik in Frankreich', *Räte-Korrespondenz*, No. 18/19, August 1936.

77 'De Belgische mijnwerkersstaking', *RIC*, No. 9, August 1935. In No. 10, September 1935, the GIC declared – exaggeratedly – that the May 1935 strike by Belgian miners was the 'high water-mark of proletarian class-struggle for ten years'.

78 This political banner was raised in an anonymous pamphlet written by Cajo Brendel: see Brendel 1936, p. 12.

1933, was part of the council-communist theory of a 'new workers' movement' (see Chapter Seven).

Initially, the GIC saw the French workers' strikes – which were followed by movements in Belgium and even the Netherlands<sup>79</sup> – as a sign that the international proletariat was emerging from the depth of defeat. In their form – their mass-nature, spontaneity, factory-occupations – they were 'a gain that will benefit the whole world-proletariat'. And in their breadth, they were not far away from 'the great revolutionary movements of the working class in the last thirty years'. In reality, the GIC saw the form of the strikes as being more positive than their content.

In fact, far from heralding a 'French revolution' – as the Trotskyists proclaimed at the time – the strikes took place under the banner of the Popular Front, whose parties exerted an unprecedented control over the French proletariat. The left-parties and the unions had succeeded in propping up the power of the bourgeoisie by putting an end to the wildcat-strikes. The growth in the number of unionised workers – 'from 900,000 to 2,600,000' – was a sign that 'order' reigned.<sup>80</sup> The Popular Front and the union front had kept bourgeois order intact:

The mass-strike had become a reality against the will of the organisations. Now it was a question of giving it a character that would not endanger the capitalist order. For that, above all, order was needed. Order in the running of the strike. No threat to the rights of private property, no attacks on 'public order'.<sup>81</sup>

In the end, the workers' struggle had been put down by the union- and state-apparatus, incarnated in the 'old workers' movement' (PCF and SFIO).

Like the Italian Communist Fraction at the same time,<sup>82</sup> the Dutch left insisted that the Popular Front, far from being a 'failed revolution', marked a

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79 In June 1936, a great fishermen's strike broke out in IJmuiden, Holland. The strike-committee was dominated by the CPN. During the strike, the latter did not hesitate to propose a 'united front' with the fascists: 'We salute the National-Socialist fishermen, who are in struggle at IJmuiden alongside their Red brothers' (Quoted by the GIC in 'De IJmuider visschers-staking', *PIC*, No. 11, July 1936).

80 *PIC*, No. 9, June 1936, p. 10. The GIC's figures for trade-union membership in 1936 were inaccurate. The CGT had 4–5 million members. See Prost 1964.

81 'De Fransche massastaking', *PIC*, No. 14, August 1936, *Räte-Korrespondenz*, No. 18–19, August 1936.

82 See 'La victoire du Front Populaire en France', *Bilan*, No. 31, May–June 1936.

further step in the preparations for a second world-war.<sup>83</sup> The nationalist, anti-fascist ideology propagated by the left was directly dragooning the workers into war against Germany; in this sense, the politics of the Popular Front were similar to those of National Socialism in Germany. It only differed on one point: by basing itself on the left and the unions, it was more 'effective':

Such a way of subjugating the wage-labourers is seen by the majority of the French bourgeoisie as more reliable than the fascist method of domination, which does away with all safety-valves and can only work with the methods of the butcher, with tear-gas and machine-guns ... It is true that National Socialism in Germany and the Popular Front in France both carry out the same task. They both create a national order on the basis of capitalist relations of production.<sup>84</sup>

However, while the GIC saw that the Popular Front and its parties were directly part of the war-effort, in the name of anti-fascism, it did not consider that the strikes of May–June 1936 were a defeat for the proletariat. Unlike the Paul Mattick group in the USA, it optimistically opined that 'the proletarian struggle for liberation has gained a new impulse internationally'.<sup>85</sup> This difficulty in recognising the extent of the proletariat's defeat, the opening up of a period of counter-revolution, was not limited to the GIC. The hope of a new revolutionary wave, emerging even out of a world-war, animated all revolutionary groups in the 1930s.

## 5 The 'Inevitable War' – War and War-Economy

Unlike the majority of the Italian left, who thought a generalised war impossible, but expected a succession of localised conflicts, the GIC had argued from 1935 onwards that world-war was inevitable. In an article significantly sub-titled 'The Second World-War is inevitable', the Dutch group analysed the 'localised' conflict between Italy and Abyssinia as the start of the coming Second World-War:

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83 Trotsky expressed this optimistic vision in an article with the evocative title 'The French Revolution has begun': see Trotsky 1974b.

84 'De Fransche massastaking', *PTC*, No. 14, August 1936; *Räte-Korrespondenz*, No. 18–19, August 1936.

85 Ibid.

Superficially the war between Italy and Abyssinia looks like a war between two countries, in which Abyssinia is defending its independence. In reality, this is a conflict within world-capitalism, in this case between Italy and Britain. Up until now this war has been a rehearsal for the coming Second World-War; but it could be the spark that sets the whole world on fire. But it is by no means certain that its immediate consequence will be world-war.<sup>86</sup>

It is clear that for the GIC, world-war could 'begin at any moment'. Whatever the nature of these localised wars – 'national-liberation wars' of China against Japan, a war between two big imperialist states – every conflict was 'at the same time a precursor of the second world-war'.<sup>87</sup>

Faced with the danger of war, the Dutch left – along with the Italian left, Mattick's group in the USA, and a few others – was one of the rare groups laying claim to revolutionary Marxism to define the coming war as an imperialist war, where the workers of both camps would be called upon to sacrifice themselves for the nation. The second world-war would be no different from the first: it would be an imperialist war on both sides, 'democratic' and 'fascist', for the re-division of the world. There was no 'progressive' camp to defend, the 'anti-fascist' any more than the 'fascist'. All the countries were imperialist and had to be fought in the same way by the proletariat, which had to take up Liebknecht's cry that 'the main enemy is at home'.

According to that vision, anti-fascist ideology was being used to prepare the workers of the 'democratic' countries for the coming world-war: '... the slogan "against fascism" has become the rallying-cry of all the open or hidden partisans of the ruling class and is being used to sign the broad masses up for the war-front'. But the anti-fascist war-ideology could not succeed without the effective aid given by what the GIC called the 'so-called workers' movement', namely, the left-parties, whose function was to 'push the workers to stand alongside "their" national bourgeoisie in the war'.<sup>88</sup>

In the end, it was the 'defence of the USSR', propagated by the Trotskyist groups and Sneeveliet's RSAP, that was the key to the bourgeoisie's ability to enlist the workers for the war. For the GIC there was no question of calling on the workers to defend the land of state-capitalism in a war. In contradiction with its theory of a 'juvenile' and 'progressive' state-capitalism in Russia, but

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86 'Klassenkampf im Kriege', *Räte-Korrespondenz*, No. 14, December 1935.

87 Ibid.

88 Ibid.



in line with its internationalist principles, the GIC called for the overthrow of the Russian bourgeoisie and for no support to it in case of war. This position, which had been that of the German and Dutch left since 1921, was recalled forcefully by the GIC in 1933, when Trotsky proclaimed the need for a Fourth International: 'The defence of the USSR can no longer be part of the programme of a proletarian International. Today this can only mean working for the victory of the states allied to Russia'.<sup>89</sup>

The last – and by no means least – weapons of capitalism in the 'front of ideological armament' were the slogans on 'the rights of nations' and the defence of 'national independence'. Once again, as the Italian-Abyssinian conflict had shown, the 'national-liberation struggle' was used to dissolve the class-front into a war-front. The starting-point for the proletariat's approach was not that of the 'independent nation', but rather itself as an independent class. In reality, 'the independent nation' is composed of classes who are irreconcilably opposed to each other. It is the phraseology of the bourgeoisie that transforms these classes into 'the people', all the better to exploit the oppressed classes and use them for its own ends. The 'rights of a people have never been anything but the rights of the ruling class'.<sup>90</sup> The position of the GIC – which was identical to that of the Italian left – was in absolute opposition to that of Trotsky and the RSAP who came out in favour of Abyssinian independence and in support of the *Negus*. Thus the organs of the RSAP asserted that 'the slogan "the enemy is at home" is not valid for Russia and Abyssinia'.<sup>91</sup> This position could only lead to abandoning internationalism and betraying the proletariat. The GIC insisted that the RSAP was marching into the *Union sacrée* and 'was opening the door to a future alliance with the bourgeoisie on the basis of a loyal opposition'.<sup>92</sup>

For the GIC, it was clear that in every war revolutionaries' attitude was defeatism. Internationalism meant refusing to choose one camp against another: '... for workers, the question of who wins the war is a matter of indifference'.<sup>93</sup>

The GIC followed the international situation closely right up to 1939. None of the peace-declarations of the various states, which were all engaged in a frantic arms-race, could mask the reality of an approaching Second World-War. In October 1938 the GIC denounced the Munich agreement as a 'fraud' which

89 *PIK*, No. 5, September 1933, p. 31.

90 'Klassenkampf im Kriege', *Räte-Korrespondenz*, No. 14, December 1935.

91 *De Nieuwe Fakkelt*, October 18, 1935.

92 'Trotsky en het interview van Stalin', *PIK*, No. 7, April 1936.

93 'Klassenkampf im Kriege', *Räte-Korrespondenz*, No. 14, December 1935.

'merely deferred the war'.<sup>94</sup> This lucid position was far-removed from that of the majority of *Bilan*, who saw the agreement as an inter-imperialist entente to 'put off the spectre of revolution'.<sup>95</sup>

The GIC's clarity on the inevitability of war can be explained, in part, by its explicit rejection of the new theories developing within the revolutionary milieu at the time, particularly among the Italian left, on the nature of war. According to Vercesi, the Italian Fraction's principal theoretician, the war-economy made it possible for capitalism to overcome its economic contradictions, and thus even made inter-imperialist economic rivalries secondary.<sup>96</sup> War no longer had economic roots, but social ones: it had become a war against the proletariat, a war to destroy the proletariat. To this end, the bourgeoisie of all countries was diverting its contradictions into 'localised wars'. There were no more imperialist antagonisms, but an 'inter-imperialist solidarity' against the proletariat.

The GIC had to resist such a 'theory' – which totally blinded its adherents to the approaching war – because it also emerged, albeit to a lesser extent, in the ranks of international council-communism. In 1935, the French councilist *Groupe de discussion révolutionnaire prolétarien*<sup>97</sup> advanced positions close to those of Vercesi at the 'Second Conference of opponents of War and the *Union sacrée*'.<sup>98</sup>

The contribution by this group, which the GIC published in Dutch, advanced the idea that the coming war would be 'a war of the bourgeoisie against the proletariat', aimed at destroying factories and the unemployed.<sup>99</sup> Like the majority

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94 GIC 1938.

95 *Communisme*, No. 19, Brussels, October 1938.

96 For more on the positions of Vercesi, whose real name was Ottorino Perrone, see our work on the Italian communist left: Bourrinet 1980.

97 This was, in fact, the *Groupe d'études révolutionnaires prolétarien*, which was in contact with the Italian communist left in France. In 1936, *Bilan* proposed to this group to hold 'joint informative conferences', which would be stepping-stones towards 'laying the foundations for a communist organisation in France' (*Bilan*, No. 32, July 1936).

98 This conference, called by the 'Committee against the War and the Sacred Union', took place in September 1935, in Saint-Denis, a working-class suburb north of Paris. This was the stronghold of Jacques Doriot, ex-leader of the French CP, who in 1936 established his own fascist organisation, the *Parti Populaire Français* (PPF). The conference brought together an eclectic collection of groups: anarchists, pacifists, *Révolution prolétarienne*, and the *Union communiste*. The latter was forced to recognise that the conference had been a failure: see *Bulletin d'informations et de liaison* No. 2, November 1935, published by the *Union communiste*.

99 'Het revolutionair proletarische studiegroep over het oorlogsvraagstuk', *PTC*, No. 11, Octo-

of the Italian left, it talked about inter-imperialist solidarity between the different states against the proletariat: 'All the bourgeoisies must unite to partially annihilate the proletariat'.

Without opening a theoretical debate on the war-economy, the GIC rejected the strange idea that arms-production made it possible to 'overcome the contradictions of capitalism'. For the GIC, the war economy was there to prepare world-war. Arms-production was not a new field for the accumulation of capital, but a destruction of capital: 'For the capitalists of all countries, armaments constitute a large portion of their profits, but the billions devoted to weapons of war are just old iron if they are not used, the profits concealed in them are not realised if they do not produce new profits ... to fail to do so brings bankruptcy and the collapse of their power.'<sup>100</sup>

Thus even economically, war was inevitable in order to realise through military conquest the profits frozen in the arms-industry. War was thus set in the logic of capitalism.

This vision of an inevitable war might seem very pessimistic. Without saying so clearly and explicitly, the GIC recognised that the course towards revolution had been overturned. The proletariat could no longer prevent the war: 'It is not a question of preventing the war, but of knowing whether the working class can overthrow the bourgeoisie and establish its own authority'.<sup>101</sup>

In fact, like the Trotskyists and the Italian communist left, the GIC still hoped that the war would lead to proletarian revolution, as it had at the end of the First World-War. Whatever the result of military operations, whether a triumph of the 'fascist' bloc or victory for the 'democratic' camp, the revolution would inevitably arise in the defeated countries:

We know for certain that the defeat of the fascist states will lead to a revolution in Central Europe ... The fall of the Hitler and Mussolini

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ber 1935. In an introduction, the GIC criticised the article's artificial attempts to create a new 'Zimmerwald movement'. This had been the left-communist position in 1927, when Karl Korsch proposed the formation of a new Zimmerwald. Both the KAPD and the Italian communist left had rejected the proposal, since the historical conditions for the creation of a new International – a political settling within the revolutionary movement – were not yet ripe. The GIC was opposed to any creation of revolutionary organisations or parties or any regroupment of existing revolutionary forces, which it saw as the heritage of old-fashioned Leninist conceptions.

100 GIC 1939, pp. 6–7.

101 'Klassenkampf im Kriege', *Räte-Korrespondenz*, No. 14, December 1935.

régimes will give birth to a proletarian revolution that could only be crushed by the combined forces of world-capital, and perhaps could not be crushed! Losing the war would mean the collapse of French capitalism; it would mean the loss of the French colonies, of French capital placed abroad and the revolution in France; it would mean the disintegration of the British Empire and the revolution of the British workers, the insurrection of the exploited masses in all the British colonies, perhaps revolution in the USA. Winning the war would mean a revolution in Central Europe, which would spread like wildfire to the wage-slaves and soldiers of the victorious countries.<sup>102</sup>

These optimistic predictions were to be refuted by the course of the Second World-War. A defeated proletariat did not make a revolution at the end of the war. The schema of war and revolution was completely disproved in 1944–5.

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102 GIC 1939, p. 15.

## The Dutch Internationalist Communists and the Events in Spain (1936–7)

While the civil war in Spain did not cause a crisis in the GIC, it nonetheless had a profound importance in the group's history. It was the test-bed of the Dutch group's revolutionary theory, confronted with a civil war which was to prepare the Second World-War, in the midst of revolutionary convulsions and an atmosphere of 'anti-fascist' popular fronts.

Although often identified with anarchism, Dutch 'councilism' vigorously set itself apart from this current and denounced not its weaknesses, but its 'passage into the camp of the bourgeoisie'. The GIC defended a political analysis of the 'Spanish revolution' close to that of the Italian communist left.

Finally, the events in Spain gave rise to the GIC's last attempt before 1939 to confront the revolutionary political milieu to the left of Trotskyism in Europe. This attempt was not without confusion, and even political ambiguity.

Following the creation of the Republic, the internationalist Dutch communists followed the evolution of the Spanish situation with great care. In 1931, the GIC denounced not only the Republican bourgeoisie, which supported the Socialist Party of Largo Caballero, but also the anarchist movement. The CNT abandoned its old 'principle' of hostility to electoralism, and had its adherents vote *en masse* for Republican candidates. Far from seeing the CNT as a component of the workers' movement, the GIC insisted that anarcho-syndicalism had crossed the Rubicon with its 'collaboration with bourgeois order'. The CNT had become 'the ally of the bourgeoisie'. As an anarcho-syndicalist current, and thus a partisan of trade-unionism, the political action of the CNT could only lead to a strengthening of capitalism. If it were to take power, it would establish nothing other than state-capitalism: '[the CNT] is a union aspiring to the conquest of power by the CNT. That necessarily leads to a dictatorship over the proletariat by the leadership of the CNT (state-capitalism)'.<sup>1</sup>

Faithful to the positions of the German left on the nature of revolutionary syndicalism, the GIC saw nothing revolutionary in Spanish anarcho-syndicalism. As a union, the CNT could only take on the management of the capitalist economy, and not the destruction of the state. That is why any attempt to

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1 'Die Rolle der CNT in der spanischen Revolution', *PTC*, December 1931, in German.

'renovate' the CNT in order to give it a 'revolutionary' orientation was doomed to failure. Its left wing, along with Durruti's FAI, were nothing other than attempts to revive the corpse of syndicalism. The GIC declared forcefully that 'anarchist opposition is a deceitful illusion'.<sup>2</sup>

When the election of 16 February 1936 gave power to the parties of the *Frente popular*, the GIC denounced the united front of all the parties of the left for diverting the class-struggle away from its own objective: the formation of a 'general workers' class-front'. The Spanish workers were 'prisoners of the united front'. They could only regain their autonomy through a merciless fight against 'their mortal enemy' (the parties of the united front), and by setting up their own organs: 'It is not parliaments that must take power in hand, but ourselves, in our action-committees, in our workers' councils. It is only as a power of organised councils that we can conquer'.<sup>3</sup>

In July 1936 came the military *pronunciamiento*. Against the will of the Popular Front, which was quite ready to reach an understanding with the military, the workers of Barcelona and Madrid took to the barracks. They armed themselves and formed militias. In the town and countryside, above all in Catalonia, some industrial and agricultural 'collectivisations' were enacted under the leadership of both the anarchist union, and the Socialist union, the UGT (*Unión General de los Trabajadores*). But the workers had not overthrown the Republican government of the left wing of the bourgeoisie: the government of the *Generalitat* of Catalonia survived with the support of the POUM and the CNT. Some 'workers' committees' certainly were created, but they were more a combination of the different parties and unions than they were real workers' councils.

Was this really a proletarian revolution on the march, with its 'collectivisations' and the arming of the workers, or was it a 'bourgeois revolution' in which the Spanish proletariat participated as a contributory force, or even nothing more than proletarian convulsions diverted into the Popular Front and the military combat on the fronts? Was it necessary to fight first on the 'military front', before fighting on the 'class-front' against the Republican government? Such were the concrete questions were posed in the internationalist camp at the time. In the Netherlands, the anarchist groups and Sneevliet's semi-Trotskyist RSAP gave their 'critical' support to the Popular Front government in the fight against Franco, in the name of anti-fascism. Their position was thus little

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2 Ibid.

3 'Verkiezing en eenheidsfront in Spanje!', *PTC*, No. 3, February 1936.

different from that adopted in Spain by the POUM and by the CNT, which then entered the government of the *Frente popular*.

In the Netherlands the question arose whether the council-communist groups were going to support the anarchist 'collectivisations' and the CNT, whose positions were 'anti-Bolshevik'. Given that they considered that the proletariat's economic tasks took priority over the political task of destroying the state, one might expect that the Dutch 'councilists' would be very ambiguous in their critiques of anarcho-syndicalism. At least this is what Paul Mattick claimed in 1970 in his preface to the re-edition of the American council-communist press.<sup>4</sup> He claimed that the position of the council-communists had been the following in 1936–7: 'The anti-fascist civil war of Spain ... found the council-communists almost naturally – despite their Marxist orientation – on the side of the anarcho-syndicalists, even though circumstances forced the latter to sacrifice their own principles for the prolonged struggle against the common fascist enemy'.

Nothing could be less true of the Dutch council-communists, who criticised anarchist policy throughout the Spanish Civil War, and never once found themselves on the same side.

## 1 The Divisions amongst the Dutch Council-Communists

In 1936, the Dutch council-communists were divided into four groups. Apart from the GIC, there were the two groups coming out of the KAPN: *De Arbeidersraad* ('The Workers' Council') and the councilist group of The Hague,<sup>5</sup> which published the periodical *Proletariër*. These three groups described themselves as Marxist. There also existed a fourth group, which had split from the GIC. This group published the periodical *Discussie*, an organ of the 'workers' groups

4 Mattick 1970. In Spanish, some important texts of the Dutch and German communist left on the civil war in Spain appear in García Velasco and Rosés Cordovilla (eds.) 1999, with an introduction by Cajo Brendel.

5 This group – which Cajo Brendel, one of the founders of the council-communist group *Daad en Gedachte* (along with Jaap Meulenkamp) belonged to – first published the periodical *De Radencommunist* in 1933. It properly constituted itself as a group in 1935 and was close to the GIC. After *Proletariër*, it published *Proletarische Beschouwingen* ('Proletarian Reflections') from 1936 to 1938. At the time Cajo Brendel collaborated with various periodicals, including anarchist ones – *De Vrije Socialist* in 1938–9, together with Gerhard Rijnders (1876–1950) – without ever renouncing his own positions.

of the left' 'published by workers of the anarchist tendency' and distributed at the unemployment-offices.<sup>6</sup> This group was, in fact, 'anarcho-councilist'.

It was symptomatic that the 'councilist' milieu should find itself divided on the question of Spain. It created a definitive frontier between *De Arbeidersraad* and the other three groups. Despite its talk of the 'power of the workers' councils', the KAPN's founding nucleus found itself alongside the RSAP in calling for 'anti-fascist unity' and unconditional support for the POUM and the FAI.<sup>7</sup>

The three other groups were united in their total rejection of the Popular Front and anti-fascist unity. Their disagreements lay in their interpretation of revolutionary events in Spain. For the Hague group, as for *Discussie*, it was nothing less than a 'bourgeois revolution' taking place against the 'feudal system'. But whereas different socialist and anarchist groups of the left drew the conclusion that it was necessary to defend the Republic against feudalism, these groups advanced the need to fight against the 'bourgeois revolution' in favour of the proletarian revolution. For the anarcho-councilist group *Discussie*, this led to the somewhat ambiguous position that although the 'bourgeois revolution' led to state-capitalism, in feudal Spain there were, nonetheless, two 'revolutionary groups': the proletariat and the 'rising bourgeoisie'.<sup>8</sup>

The councilist group from The Hague had a much clearer position, very close to that of the Italian communist left.<sup>9</sup> From false premises – events in Spain were seen as being in continuity with the bourgeois revolutions of the nineteenth century – it ended up with the same political conclusions. The war in Spain was a fight between two groups of capitalists. Although armed, the workers remained oppressed. They were prisoners of the militias, 'bourgeois military organisations'. The task of the hour was not to fight inside these organisms, but to destroy them completely. The position of *Proletariër* was that of 'revolutionary defeatism':

The struggle in Spain between the 'legal government' and the 'insurgent camp' is not at all a struggle for ideals, but a struggle of determined capitalist groups embedded in the bourgeois Republic against other capitalist

6 *Discussie*, 'organ of workers' groupings of the left'; first issue in 1934.

7 'Spanje', *De Arbeidersraad*, No. 1/2, January–February 1937: 'The workers of the POUM are sacrificing their lives in the struggle against fascism ...' This group essentially supported the policies of the POUM by putting forwards the need for a workers' alliance, as in 1934, between the 'anti-fascist' organisations of the POUM and CNT.

8 'De opstand in Spanje!!!', *Discussie*, No. 7, August 1936.

9 The texts in *Bilan* of the Italian communist left or 'Bordigists' on the Spanish question have been re-published: see Barrot (Dauvé) 1979.



groups ... In terms of principles, this Spanish 'cabinet' is identical to the bloody Lerroux régime, which in 1934 shot down thousands of Spanish workers ... At present, Spanish workers are oppressed with weapons in their hands! ... [T]he workers are sent to the front and there they are harangued by the socialist bosses with the words: 'honourably defend our revolution at the rear'; but here, they 'forget' to say that this revolution is a bourgeois revolution. The proletariat fights inside bourgeois military organisations, but soon the decomposition, the putrefaction of these organisations will be on the agenda. However, they can only be destroyed if the proletariat forms its own organisations. That means: the organisation of the proletariat in struggle for itself, that of the workers' and soldiers' councils will soon have to, by the advance of the movement, enter into struggle with the bourgeoisie.<sup>10</sup>

The GIC tried to establish a more coherent position. Its political struggle was essentially a defence of the workers' struggle against anarchism. While its analysis was very close to *Bilan* and the *Proletariër* group, the GIC sometimes appeared divided on what responses to give. Giving diverse interpretations of the Spanish situation, the GIC expressed contradictory positions in its periodical (*PIC*) which either manifested indifference to the fate of the Spanish proletariat – this is nothing but a 'bourgeois revolution' – or conciliation with the analysis of groups like *Union Communiste* or the Belgian LCI (see below).

## 2 The Lessons Drawn by the GIC from the Events in Spain

### 2.1 No 'Bourgeois Revolution'

It is remarkable to see that the GIC implicitly abandoned the analysis that had been set out in its 1934 *Theses on Bolshevism*, and since adopted by the whole council-communist movement. These *Theses* (see Chapter Seven) held that the Russian Revolution was a bourgeois revolution, because it had been drowned by the peasantry and took place in a backward country. Spain was still a backward country, so did that mean that the only 'revolution' on the agenda would be 'bourgeois' and 'anti-feudal'? Did the insurrection of July 1936 take place in the context of a bourgeois revolution?

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10 'De beweging in Spanje', *Proletariër*, No. 2, 27 July 1936.

In response to different 'councilist' groups who defended this conception, the GIC forcefully declared that only the proletarian revolution was on the agenda, in Spain as everywhere else:

The epoch where such a (bourgeois) revolution was possible is completed. In 1848, one could still apply this schema, but now the situation has completely changed ... It is not any longer the struggle between the rising bourgeoisie and feudalism that predominates, but, on the contrary, the struggle between the proletariat and monopoly capital.<sup>11</sup>

The article quoted, which was a response to a tendency existing within the GIC, noted that it was false to talk of 'feudalism' in Spain. There existed a powerful Spanish bourgeoisie at the head of capitalist production, on both sides of the 'military front':

In Spain also, a powerful bourgeoisie has dominated for a long time ... It is monopoly-capital that dominates the whole situation in Spain. In Spain, there is capitalist production, and not only in industrial Catalonia, but also in all the other regions.<sup>12</sup>

To talk of a 'bourgeois revolution' thus created dangerous ambiguities: 'Such a position is false and dangerous for our class'.<sup>13</sup> If some 'councilist' groups with 'good intentions' described the war in Spain as an anti-proletarian 'bourgeois revolution', the better to denounce the Popular Front, some social-democratic or Stalinist organisations employed the same phraseology to call for an anti-

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11 'Lessen uit Spanje. Antwoord op discussie-artikel', *PIC*, No. 6, March 1937.

For Cajo Brendel, Spain in 1936 underwent a 'bourgeois revolution' and could not do anything else:

'... the Spanish Revolution cannot take the classical form of the French Revolution of 1789. This "bourgeois" revolution must be made without the support of the bourgeoisie and, in a sense, against it. The working class becomes, in a sense, the executor of a still-born revolution: even if led by the workers, this revolution does not change in character; it is destined to eliminate the feudal layers and assure the rise of capitalism.' (Brendel and Simon 1979).

Cajo Brendel wrote a relevant Dutch-language history on 'revolution and counter-revolution in Spain': see Brendel 1977.

A French historian compared the war in Spain to the American Civil War (1861–5) and/or to the Mexican Revolution of 1910–40: Bennassar 2004, p. 7.

12 'Lessen uit Spanje. Antwoord op discussie-artikel', *PIC*, No. 6, March 1937.

13 'Het anarchisme en de organisatie van de revolutie', *PIC*, No. 5, March 1937.

feudal and 'progressive' fight under the flag of the Republican bourgeoisie. And finally, the dichotomy made between a pseudo-feudalism, supported by Franco and the fascist powers, as against the 'rising' democratic bourgeoisie, ended up in the same misleading opposition between 'democracy' and 'fascism'.

## 2.2 'Anti-Fascist Front' or 'Proletarian Revolution'?

The GIC very clearly rejected any identification of the events in Spain with a struggle between fascism and democracy. July 1936, at the beginning of the civil war, was not a confrontation between two fractions of the dominant class ('republicans' and 'fascists'), but between two classes: the exploited class of the workers and poor peasants, and the whole of the equally reactionary ruling class: '[the] struggle that has raged since 17 July in Spain is not a struggle between fascism and democracy, nor a struggle between the Popular Front government and insurgent militias. It is a struggle between revolution and Spanish counter-revolution: between, on one side, the workers of industry and of the country supported by the impoverished peasants, and, on the other side, all the reactionary forces of the aristocracy, the clergy and the bourgeoisie.'<sup>14</sup>

In its first political reactions, at the end of July 1936, the GIC was in no doubt that the first signs of a proletarian revolution were present in Spain. The strength of the revolutionary proletariat had been directly proportional to the impotence of the Popular Front faced with the *Pronunciamiento*: in a few hours, the insurrection swept away the officer-corps and the *Guardia Civil*. There was no doubt that, faced with the insurgent workers, the various factions of the bourgeoisie (monarchists, republicans, and fascists) would openly demonstrate the solidarity of their class. The more the struggle of the workers took on a revolutionary content, the more the unity of the bourgeoisie would become clear: 'The more the power of the workers threatens the position of capital, in the same proportion grows the tendency among the bourgeoisie to push the Popular-Front government to reach a compromise with the fascists in order to together cut down their common enemy: the revolutionary proletariat.'<sup>15</sup>

In light of the facts, this 'declaration' was quite justified.<sup>16</sup>

At the beginning of events in Spain, the GIC had the tendency to apply the lessons of the Russian and German revolutions mechanically, while nevertheless remaining cautious in its analysis of the evolution of events.

14 *Räte-Korrespondenz*, No. 18/19, August 1936, 'Klassenkampf in Spanien', in *PIC* No. 13, August 1936.

15 *Ibid.*

16 The attempts at compromise between the Republican leaders and the nationalist generals are amply documented. See Bolloten 1977, pp. 50–53.

### 2.3 *The 'Lessons of July 1936' in Spain*

For the GIC, the events of July 1936 in Spain were in continuity with the proletarian revolution in Russia. The insurrection of the Spanish workers had some similarities with this 'period of the Russian Revolution from July to October 1917, where the workers, sailors and peasants struggled against Kornilov's White Guards'.<sup>17</sup> This meant that the proletarian revolution in Spain was moving towards the seizure of power, as it did after July 1917. The assimilation of Franco to Kornilov was commonplace.<sup>18</sup> The GIC, like many other revolutionary groups, had a tendency, for some weeks at least, to define the struggle on the military front as a defence of the revolution faced with Franco's 'Whites'.<sup>19</sup> That meant that the subjective conditions for proletarian revolution in Spain were present, as they had been in Russia in 1917: the end of a short counter-revolution, after the 1927 crushing of the Chinese revolution, was revealed by the arming of the workers and the formation of workers' councils.

For the GIC, it was the militias and the committees that appeared in the July Days that demonstrated the reality of the revolution. The militias were considered as the ferment of the armed dictatorship of the proletariat: '... as long as these militias still rule the streets, the government cannot do what it sees fit when the workers defend their own interests. They rule the whole of production and distribution and take the measures necessary to pursue their struggle, without being constrained by bourgeois property rights'.<sup>20</sup> Fascinated by the economic tasks of the militias and the committees, the GIC was as yet not aware of their role of recruiting workers for the military front.

But, as it first took a position, the GIC underlined very strongly the historic differences between Spain in 1936 and Russia and Germany in 1917–18. In

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17 *Räte-Korrespondenz*, No. 18/19, August 1936, 'Klassenkampf in Spanien', in *PIC* No. 13, August 1936.

18 This comparison of Franco to Kornilov was very often raised by the Trotskyists in 1936–7, but rejected by some radical dissenters: 'The Kerensky ministry – at the time of Kornilov – when compared to that of Caballero today, presents this fundamental difference: the former was a last attempt by capitalism to fend off the proletariat's attack against its state and its system; the Caballero government represents the perfected form of capitalism's plan to avoid any incidence of the struggle against the capitalist state developing' (*Bilan*, No. 39, January–February 1937).

19 This was the case of groups like the *Union Communiste* in France and the *Ligue des Communistes Internationalistes* in Belgium.

20 *Räte-Korrespondenz*, No. 18/19, August 1936, 'Klassenkampf in Spanien', in *PIC* No. 13, August 1936.

that sense, its position was already coming close to that of the Italian left around *Bilan*.<sup>21</sup>

'Spain is not a repetition of the Russian Revolution.' The GIC underlined that social relations in Spain, given the numerical weight of the proletariat, were much closer to those of Western Europe, despite the undeniable existence of a strong agricultural sector. On the other hand, revolutionary events in Spain unfolded in a different context: not following a war, which had weakened the Western bourgeoisie, but following the Asturias defeat of 1934. The revolution 'insofar as it unfolded in Spain' – as the GIC stressed, refusing to talk of a 'Spanish Revolution' – would certainly have 'a much more proletarian-communist character than in Russia', but would be impossible without the revolution breaking out simultaneously across the whole of Europe. From this point of view, the 'objective conditions', faced with a strengthened capitalism in 1936, were much more difficult:

... The Spanish workers have to deal, not with a Western Europe weakened by war, but with a much stronger capitalism. The proletarian revolution in Spain is only possible as part of the revolution across the whole of Europe ... A victory of the proletariat in Spain (according to the Trotskyist conception: the installation of socialism in a single country) is out of the question as long as capital remains lord and master in the rest of the Europe, until the revolution breaks out everywhere.<sup>22</sup>

The committees that appeared in 1936, presented as true workers' councils, were nothing like the Russian soviets.<sup>23</sup> They were more like the workers' councils of November 1918 in Germany, under the grip of the organisations of the left: 'The committees, in reality, cannot yet be considered as the direct representation of the workers. They are, rather, the result of a compromise made between the leaders of the different organisations who have been "democratically" allowed to take part in them.'<sup>24</sup>

Consequently, it was inevitable that the Spanish workers should 'come into conflict with these committees or one of their parties'.<sup>25</sup>

21 For the positions of the Italian communist left around *Bilan*, see Bourrinet 1999, Chapter 5.

22 *Räte-Korrespondenz*, No. 18/19, August 1936, 'Klassenkampf in Spanien', in *PIC* No. 13, August 1936.

23 See 'Brief uit Spanje', *PIC*, No. 9, June 1937.

24 *Räte-Korrespondenz*, No. 18/19, August 1936, 'Klassenkampf in Spanien', in *PIC* No. 13, August 1936.

25 *Ibid.*

The civil war in Spain integrated into generalised war. Given that the international context did not favour revolution, the GIC envisaged the possibility that the war in Spain would rapidly open out into a world-war, where the Popular Front would play the role of agent of the *Union sacrée*:

The other possibility is that the Spanish Civil War will be the signal for international war. In this case, the battle for the domination of the Mediterranean on Spanish soil, with troops and arms of the great enemy imperialist powers, and in the interests of the belligerent states ... In the event of war, the Spanish Popular Front will integrate itself into the imperialist war-front.<sup>26</sup>

#### 2.4 *The 'Tasks of the Proletariat' in Spain and Europe*

The evolution of the situation in Spain, with the strengthening of the Popular-Front government and the growing intervention of the rival great powers, led the Dutch council-communists to take more clear-cut positions, all the more so since disagreements had appeared amongst them.

Although the GIC's press was not explicit about internal dissent, it seems that two informal minorities opposed its line.

The first 'minority' was formed by a militant of the GIC who had, on his own account, joined the militias on the Aragon front.<sup>27</sup> It was an isolated case in the GIC, but it was symptomatic that no explicit condemnation of his engagement was made. A larger minority, like the group *Proletariër*, analysed the 'Spanish Revolution' as a bourgeois, anti-proletarian revolution. This minority, which was either a group of militants or a circle close to the GIC – the GIC's organisational vagueness makes it impossible to be more precise – made a lucid appraisal of the 'lessons of Spain', but using a councilist method.<sup>28</sup> It stated that 'the struggle [in Spain] did not begin as a struggle for the liberation of the working class'. The workers were becoming the allies of the Republican bourgeoisie, prisoners of the false dilemma between fascism and democracy. It was no longer a question of a fight of class against class, but 'of a struggle of parties, of opinions, of ideological groups' opening out into a conflict between the great military powers. Thus the class-antagonism between bourgeoisie and proletariat had been wiped out. The minority thus concluded that the workers' fight against the Popular Front was lost in advance. There was no hope:

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> 'Lessen uit Spanje', *PIC*, No. 3, February 1937. The GIC specified that the article in question was not its own, but was a contribution to the discussion.

<sup>28</sup> 'Lessen uit Spanje', *PIC*, No. 6, March 1937.

'... the struggle in Spain is not, and cannot serve as, an example in order to draw the lessons for the struggle of the proletarian class ... The struggle of the (Spanish) workers is a hopeless struggle for the preservation of the democratic bourgeoisie'.<sup>29</sup>

The GIC distanced itself very clearly from both these 'defeatist' positions. The first, because it led to the abandonment of the class-struggle against the Republican régime, by proclaiming the number-one task to be the struggle against Franco. The second, because it proposed no fightback against the Popular Front and no revolutionary perspective for the world-proletariat in Spain and in Europe.<sup>30</sup> Aware that for the Spanish workers to rally behind the Republican state and the UGT and CNT unions would lead to a bloody defeat, the GIC put forwards the need for a political struggle of the Spanish and international proletariat against the bourgeoisie.

## 2.5 *'The First Task is the Destruction of the State'*

For the GIC, there were no gains of the 'Spanish Revolution' to defend. The installation of the 'militias' and anarchist collectivisation had left in place the bourgeoisie's old state-apparatus. In October 1936, Dutch council-communists denounced the 'militias' as much as the 'democratic parliament' of the Republican bourgeoisie. The collectivisations had only strengthened the power of the state, through the mediation of the unions: '... the [collectivised] enterprises have been put under the control of the unions, and work for military needs and the needs of the urban population. There is no question of autonomous workers' management'.<sup>31</sup>

The first task of the proletariat in Spain could only be political. In order to defeat Franco's White armies, the Spanish workers would first have to smash the apparatus of the Republican state from top to bottom, by setting up real workers' councils, the only form of proletarian power.

If the workers really want to form a defensive front against the Whites, they can only do so on the condition that they themselves seize political power, instead of leaving it in the hands of the Popular Front government. That means the defence of the revolution is only possible on the basis of the dictatorship of the proletariat through the means of the workers'

29 'Lessen uit Spanje (Diskussie artikel)', *PIC*, No. 3, February 1937.

30 'Het anarcho-syndicalisme in de spaansche revolutie', *PIC*, No. 16, October 1936: 'This militias' committee is not a workers' council for defence, it is more like a democratic parliament'.

31 'Illustraties van de ontwikkeling in het revolutionaire Spanje', *PIC*, No. 17, November 1936.

councils, and not on the basis of the collaboration of all the anti-fascist parties ... The destruction of the old state-apparatus and the exercising of central functions of power by the workers themselves are the axis of the proletarian revolution.<sup>32</sup>

## 2.6 *'Proletarian Revolution' in Every Country?*

The Dutch council-communists rejected all calls for intervention by the 'democratic' powers to come to the 'aid' of the Spanish workers. There could be no military aid to the proletariat. Any military aid would be used in the fight for domination by the rival imperialist powers to defend their own interests and 'strangle the class-struggle' in Spain.<sup>33</sup> This aid, which in appearance 'would save the Spanish workers', would give the '*coup de grace* to the revolution'. The GIC remarked bitterly that the class-front had been transformed into the imperialist front on the military terrain: 'The struggle in Spain is taking on the character of international conflict between the great imperialist powers ... Modern weapons from abroad have displaced the struggle onto the military terrain and, consequently, the Spanish proletariat has submitted to imperialist interests, above all to Russian interests'.<sup>34</sup>

The task of the hour for the revolutionary proletariat was thus to 'make [imperialist] intervention impossible by taking up the revolutionary struggle against its own bourgeoisie'. 'It is only by taking this road that the international proletariat will be able to show in practice its solidarity with the Spanish workers'.<sup>35</sup> It is very striking to see the viscerally 'anti-Leninist' GIC adopting Lenin's 1917 conceptions in order to demonstrate the impossibility of socialism in one country. Through the 'Spanish case', the GIC was renewing its ties with

32 'Het anarcho-syndicalisme in de Spaansche revolutie', *PIC*, No. 16, October 1936.

33 'Lessen uit Spanje', *PIC* No. 6, March 1937: 'Through foreign intervention, this class-struggle is more and more asphyxiated and the designs of the imperialist powers predominate in the war ... This is no triumph of the democratic bourgeoisie, but in every case the dictatorship of big capital over the workers'.

34 'Der Anarchismus und die spanische Revolution', *Räte-Korrespondenz*, No. 21, April 1937. The article in *Räte-Korrespondenz*, which seems to have been written by Helmut Wagner or by Paul Partos, copies entire passages out of various articles from the *PIC*. Some additions have been made, which do not correspond to the GIC's vision on the nature of anarchism in government and the fight on the military fronts. Paul Partos (1911–64), a student in Berlin, became a close friend of Karl Korsch. He emigrated to France in 1933 and was associated with anarcho-syndicalist groups; he worked for the foreign-propaganda section of the *Confederación Nacional del Trabajo* (CNT) during the Spanish Civil War.

35 *Räte-Korrespondenz*, No. 18/19, August 1936, 'Klassenkampf in Spanien', in *PIC* No. 13, August 1936.



the tradition of the Dutch left in 1917: as in Russia in 1917, if the Spanish proletariat was to take power, it would exist in interdependence with the revolutionary struggles of any particular country and those of the rest of the world:

Without world-revolution, we are lost, said Lenin. That is particularly valid for Spain ... The development of the struggle in Spain depends on its development across the entire world; but the opposite is also true. The proletarian revolution is international; reaction equally so. Any action of the Spanish proletariat will find an echo in the rest of the world; and any explosion of class-struggle there is a support to Spain's proletarian fighters.<sup>36</sup>

### 3 The GIC and the Anarchist Current

Unlike the council-communists of the USA, who maintained a conciliatory approach towards the CNT, the GIC undertook a bitter and uncompromising political struggle against the whole anarchist current.<sup>37</sup> More than the Spanish Stalinist CP and the Socialist Party, which were clearly integrated into the bourgeois state-apparatus, the CNT appeared to the GIC as the main force responsible for the ultimate defeat of the Spanish proletariat. In 1936, the CNT – the political current representing the most combative workers – joined the *Union sacrée* of the Republican parties. A reading of the GIC's press shows that it attached a greater importance to a critique of the anarchist current than to that of the Trotskyists. Not that the latter was absent; but it was more rare, though no less biting, since the Dutch RSAP and the Trotskyist groups were denounced as agents of the Popular Front and, ultimately, 'on the side of their own democratic bourgeoisie'.<sup>38</sup> But given the existence of a significant libertarian milieu in the Netherlands – which was, moreover, very heterogeneous on the Spanish question – the GIC's press gave priority to the political and theoretical struggle against the anarchist current.<sup>39</sup>

36 *Räte-Korrespondenz*, No. 22, July 1937, 'Revolution und Konterrevolution in Spanien', *PIC*, No. 10, June 1937.

37 Karl Korsch, a collaborator of Mattick's group, made himself the leader of the cause of anarchist collectivisation. See 'Economics and politics in revolutionary Spain', *Living Marxism*, No. 3, May 1938 and 'Collectivisation in Spain', *Living Marxism*, No. 6, April 1939.

38 'Klassenkampf in Spanien', *Räte-Korrespondenz*, No. 18–19, August 1936.

39 Whereas most of the important groups in the Netherlands took the side of the CNT, other

Right up to May 1937, the GIC made a profound critique of the practice of Spanish anarcho-syndicalism. From the outset, it denounced the CNT's appeal to the Spanish workers to go back to work and the barracks. By joining the anti-fascist government, and by proclaiming the priority of the fight on the military front, the CNT integrated itself into the state.<sup>40</sup> As the GIC pointed out, anarchist socialisation was nothing other than state-capitalism, with production managed by the unions.<sup>41</sup>

The events in Spain finally showed in practice the 'bankruptcy of anarcho-syndicalist conceptions'.<sup>42</sup> The libertarian principle of 'freedom for all', was expressed as 'freedom for all the anti-fascist currents', the enemies of the revolution: '... their conception of "freedom for all the anti-fascist currents" is freedom for the saboteurs of the proletarian revolution'. The rejection of the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' by the CNT, a corollary of the anarchist refusal to take power, finally led the CNT 'to forbid the workers themselves taking into their own hands the economic and political functions of society'. This would be to 'exercise their sole dictatorship over the working class'. The anarchist rejection of 'politics' turned into the participation of the CNT in the bourgeoisie's political games: elections and participation in the anti-fascist united front. Finally, anarcho-syndicalism as a 'politico-economic principle', 'leads to defeat'.<sup>43</sup>

When the GIC proclaimed the revolutionary will of the anarchist workers, it was all the better to emphasise how the doctrine and practice of anarchism was foreign to the proletariat.

Faithful to Marxist analysis, the GIC defined the whole anarchist current to be 'non-proletarian' and 'petty-bourgeois'. The Spanish 'test of fire' inevitably led the anarchists into the camp of the bourgeoisie. The 'anti-statists' became

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small anarchist grouplets, like the BAS and the AMV, made pacifist propaganda, in principle hostile to violence and the use of arms in the class-struggle. See 'Het Nederlandsche anarchisme tegenover de Spaansche revolutie', *PIC*, No. 2, January 1937.

40 The CNT was quick to theorise its integration into the Republican state:

'The entry of the CNT into the central government is one of the most significant events of the political history of our country ... At the present time, the government as an instrument of control of the organs of the state has ceased to be a force of oppression of the labouring class, just as the state no longer appears as separating society into classes. And both will stop oppressing the people all the more as members of the CNT work with them' (*Solidaridad obrera*, Barcelona, 4 November 1936).

41 For the GIC, the existence of the Central Economic Council and Militias-Committee, on the basis of the united front of the parties of the left, inevitably led to state-capitalism (see 'Het anarcho-syndicalisme in de Spaansche revolutie', in *PIC*, No. 16, October 1936).

42 'Het anarcho-syndicalisme in de Spaansche revolutie', *PIC*, No. 16, October 1936.

43 Ibid.

the parties of government in order 'to play in Spain the role that the left-social democrats, the "Independents", had played in Germany'.<sup>44</sup>

As a tendency, anarcho-syndicalism henceforth stood outside the 'proletarian camp'. In every country, including the Netherlands, 'the feeble resonance of the Spanish revolution pushed a great part of the anarchists into the camp of the bourgeoisie'. Henceforth, the defeat of the anarchist current would be 'the precondition for the forward march of the revolution', in order to avoid the total defeat of the Spanish proletariat.<sup>45</sup>

The events of May 1937 in Barcelona, where the armed workers confronted the forces of the Popular Front, wholly vindicated the GIC's analysis. The appeal by the anarchist ministers for the workers to lay down their arms showed 'the CNT is one of those mainly responsible for wiping out the insurrection, because it demoralised the proletariat at the very moment it moved against the democratic reaction'; this attitude of the CNT proved 'this organisation's definitive break with the revolutionary class-struggle'.<sup>46</sup> The counter-revolution of the 'Spanish Noskes' – as the GIC described the socialists and Stalinists in an international leaflet – was able to triumph.<sup>47</sup>

For the GIC the attitude of Spanish anarchism was not a betrayal; it was the logical outcome of anarchist principles. There was no betrayal of anarchist principles, as certain 'critical' anarchist groups claimed: 'The reproach of foreign anarchists that the CNT has betrayed its anarchist principles is not valid. The CNT cannot do anything else because it is not founded on reality; it had to join up with one of the forces on the ground'.<sup>48</sup>

The GIC, however remained strangely silent on the 'Friends of Durruti' group, which condemned the CNT's policy and took part in the fighting in Barcelona on the side of the insurgents.

Despite some undeniable – but short-lived – initial hesitations on the significance of the 'militias', the GIC ended up with a position on the war in Spain close to that of the Italian communist left. Like this latter, the GIC proclaimed the primary need for the workers in Spain to destroy the Republican state-

44 'Federatie van Anarchisten in Nederland', *PIC*, No. 12, August 1937.

45 'Het Nederlandsche anarchisme tegenover de Spaansche revolutie', *PIC*, No. 2, January 1937.

46 'Revolution und Konterrevolution in Spanien', in *Räte-Korrespondenz*, No. 22, June 1937.

47 Leaflet of May 1937: 'Klassenoerlog in Spanje' distributed in the Netherlands and Belgium by the GIC, the *Proletenstemmen* group – linked to the GIC – the Belgian L.C.I. and the 'councilist' Union of International Council Workers (*Internationale Arbeiders-Raden-Vereeniging*, or IARV) of Flanders.

48 'Revolution und Konterrevolution in Spanien', *Räte-Korrespondenz*, No. 22, June 1937.

apparatus in order to install the dictatorship of the workers' councils. The GIC underlined – against the current – that the only help to the Spanish workers would come, not from the 'intervention' of the 'democratic' bourgeoisie and the supply of weapons, but in the outbreak of class-struggle in every country, in order to break the isolation of the workers in Spain.

The no-compromise attitude of the GIC contrasted violently with that of the Trotskyist groups of the time, who called their militants to the side of the Popular Front on the military fronts and to defend Spanish 'democracy'.<sup>49</sup> The positions of groups like *Union Communiste* in France and Hennaut's *Ligue des Communistes Internationalistes* in Belgium – who were more or less moving towards council-communism – were much closer to those of Trotskyism, even of the POUM, than of the GIC.<sup>50</sup> These two organisations, like the minority in *Bilan* who were excluded for joining the militia, oscillated between 'Trotskyism' and 'councilism', without any clear political coherence.

The much greater coherence of the GIC on the Spanish question was, nevertheless, accompanied by a certain number of ambiguities linked to its conception of organisation. These ambiguities found expression in the publication in the council-communist press of positions foreign to the vision of the GIC, without any comment or real criticism. The example of *PIC*'s publication (see above) of a letter from a member of the GIC engaged in the 'militias' on the Aragon front was typical. No comment and no political condemnation of this individual 'initiative' accompanied the letter. It seems that the GIC avoided fundamental debates for fear of asserting itself as a political organisation. Seeing itself as an informal, 'open' organisation, the GIC also published, without comment, some texts from the *Union Communiste* and the Belgian LCI on the question of Spain, without any critique of these groups except on the question of the party.<sup>51</sup> But this publication was presen-

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49 See Trotsky 1973: 'Only cowards, traitors or agents of fascism can renounce aid to the Spanish republican armies. The elementary duty of every revolutionist is to struggle against the bands of Franco, Mussolini and Hitler' (p. 242). 'We are 'defencists' ... We participate in the struggle against Franco as the best soldiers [of the Popular Front Army]' (p. 289). 'Everywhere and always, wherever and whenever revolutionary workers are not powerful enough immediately to overthrow the bourgeois régime, they defend even rotten bourgeois democracy from fascism' (p. 282). 'In the Spanish Civil War, the question is: democracy or fascism' (p. 283).

50 For the history of these groups, see Bourrinet 1999.

51 'Manifeste' (title in French), by *Union Communiste, PIC*, No. 12, August 1937. Article by the LCI: 'Algemene beschouwingen over de Spaansche revolutie', *PIC*, No. 13, September 1937.

ted as a contribution to discussion. This was not the case when the GIC published a text in the German-language international review *Räte-Korrespondenz*, presented as coming from international council-communists. This text seems to have come from an ex-member of *Rote Kämpfer*, Helmut Wagner,<sup>52</sup> who worked with Mattick's group; it made a bitter critique of Spanish anarcho-syndicalism. But in contradiction with the GIC's analysis of the CNT's politics, it declared: 'Our intention is not to hold the anarchists responsible for the evolution of the anti-fascist struggle and its diversion towards a bourgeois dead end'.<sup>53</sup>

Above all, the text defended a point of view very close to that of *Union Communiste*, by affirming that the Spanish workers should not weaken the military fronts, but should, first of all, accept arms from abroad, 'in order to save their lives': 'The Spanish workers cannot struggle effectively against the unions because that would lead to a complete collapse on the military fronts. They have no other alternative: they must struggle against the fascists in order to save their lives; they must accept any help regardless of where it comes from'.

It is true that the article concluded that 'the character of the revolutionary struggle is undergoing enormous transformations and, instead of tending towards the overthrow of the bourgeoisie, it is leading to the consolidation of a new capitalist order'.<sup>54</sup>

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52 Helmut Rudolf Wagner (1904–89), born in Dresden, was a former member of the left wing of the SPD. Together with Schröder and Reichenbach, he established the *Rote Kämpfer* tendency. He was excluded from the SPD in 1931. He was the co-author of the *Theses on Bolshevism*. Exiled in Switzerland in 1934, and in contact with the GIC, in Zürich he edited the periodical *Der Internationale Beobachter* ('The International Observer') and moved to the USA in 1940. From Switzerland, he collaborated with American and German council-communist periodicals. He became a university-professor in New York in the 1950s and abandoned all political activity. In 1983 he published an important academic book *Alfred Schutz: An Intellectual Biography*, devoted to the Austrian Alfred Schutz (1899–1959). Schutz was an eminent representative of social phenomenology, author of *The Phenomenology of the Social World*, a work for which the philosopher Edmund Husserl praised him as 'an earnest and profound phenomenologist'. Helmut Wagner, who had been an assistant of Schutz's at the Graduate Faculty of the New York School for Social Research, died in the late 1980s.

53 *Räte-Korrespondenz*, No. 21, April 1937.

54 Ibid.

#### 4 The GIC and the Paris International Conference on Spain (March 1937)

The same lack of rigour on the part of the Dutch international communists is to be found in their participation in a conference on the Spanish question, comprised of international groups closer to the POUM and Trotskyism than to the international communist left.<sup>55</sup> This conference, which took place in Paris on 6–7 March 1937, had the task of discussing the situation in Spain and the evolution of the international situation.<sup>56</sup> Invitations were sent to the official Trotskyist groups and to the POUM, who did not turn up. Finally, apart from Miasnikov<sup>57</sup> who represented only himself, the conference was composed of eight groups, which formed a heterogeneous mix:

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- 55 Despite its critiques of Trotsky and Trotskyism, as a Marxist group the GIC felt itself closer to this current than to anarchism. Whilst it proclaimed the passage of anarchism into the 'bourgeois camp', the GIC recognised in Trotskyism an undeniable 'revolutionary spirit': 'Among the currents of revolutionary spirit who exercise an influence on the workers, Trotskyism is really the one with which we must seriously debate at the level of principles' ('Trotski en het radencommunisme', in *Radencommunisme*, No. 1, August 1938). The GIC, despite its disagreements with this latter current, published a text of the French Trotskyist *Parti Ouvrier Internationaliste* ('Internationalist Workers' Party', POI), on the strikes of 1938 ('Manifest der Trotskisten', *PIC*, No. 3, May 1938).
- 56 Account given in the introduction to Chazé's book. See also the letter by Hugo Oehler (1903–83) – who participated in the conference – addressed from Paris, 7 March 1937, to Streeter: Brandeis University, Goldfarb Library, Special Collection, No. 506844; Collection of documents, reports and communications relative to POUM activities during the Spanish Civil War, by Hugo Oehler and Russel Blackwell (pseudonym Rosalio Negrete, 1904–69). Oehler said that there were thirty participants at the Paris conference. He wanted to effect a regroupment with the POUM and some left-Trotskyist groups. This hope was quickly dashed due to the non-participation of the POUM.
- 57 Gavril Miasnikov (1889–1945) represented the old Russian Opposition (Workers' Group) linked to the KAPD, then to *Ouvrier Communiste* in France. See Sinigaglia 1973, and our biography of Miasnikov in Maitron and Pennetier (eds.) 2005. According to Joubert 1977, he belonged to the Pivertist PSOP, then from 1940 to the *Mouvement National Révolutionnaire*, led by Jean Rous (1890–1985), Henri Sellier (1883–1943), Henri Barré (1888–1972), Maurice Jacquier (1906–76), and Fred Zeller (1912–2003). The title of the MNR's periodical, *La Révolution française*, says much about its programme. Its slogans showed a very definite nationalist orientation: 'Proletarians, peasants, artisans, small and medium bourgeois, French bosses, unite', 'Neither pro-British, nor pro-German, but pro-French'. Led by some former Trotskyists, the MNR disappeared in June 1941. Members joined up with the Gaullist Resistance, but others re-integrated with 'classical' Trotskyism.

- Henri Chazé's *Union Communiste*, a group in France coming out of Trotskyism;<sup>58</sup>
- the Belgian *Ligue des Communistes Internationalistes*, represented by Adhemar Hennaut;
- the Dutch GIC, represented by Henk Canne Meijer;
- the ex-minority of the Italian communist left, excluded in November 1936, represented by Enrico Russo;
- the *Cercle Marxiste de Paris* (Marcel Bayard's councilist group);<sup>59</sup>
- the German Marxist Group, with a score of members and represented by Ruth Fischer and Arkadi Maslow, and also by Gavril Miasnikov, former leader of the Russian Workers' Group;<sup>60</sup>
- B.J. Field's League for a Revolutionary Workers' Party (USA and Canada), coming out of Trotskyism and represented by the Canadian William Krehm (1913–201?);<sup>61</sup>
- Hugo Oehler's Revolutionary Workers' League of the USA,<sup>62</sup> also coming from Trotskyism and close to the POUM.

The conference-participants were at odds on every agenda-point: while all the groups were in agreement on 'the march towards war', they could not agree on the characterisation of the USSR. The split on this question was between, on one side, the GIC, the LCI, *Union Communiste* and *Cercle Marxiste*, and, on the other side, the groups more attached to Trotskyism. The latter, except for the ex-minority *Bilan* – represented by Enrico Russo<sup>63</sup> – put forwards the necessity for

58 For the political journey of Henri Chazé, whose true name was Gaston Davoust (1904–84), see the notice devoted to him in Maitron and Pennetier (eds.) 1964–97, Vol. 4.

59 Marcel Bayard (1895–1956), French mathematician, chief engineer in charge of the telegraphic exploitation (Ministry of post), famous to have worked on the installation of submarine cables. The Marxist Circle was the only one in France to refer itself to council communism and had joined the group *Union communiste* in 1936.

60 This 'German group' was, in fact, that of Ruth Fischer and her companion Arkadij Maslow (1891–1941), who had been Trotskyists in exile in France from 1934–6 (Stobnicer 1980). In Paris from 1939, Maslow edited the periodical *Cahiers d'Europe*, which had an anti-fascist and anti-Stalinist orientation, 'internationalist and non-conformist [sic]' (No. 1, January 1939).

61 Krehm wrote a pamphlet on the chronological data of the Spanish Revolution: *Spain: Revolution and Counter-Revolution*, League for a Revolutionary Workers' Party Toronto, Dec. 1937.

62 For the itinerary of these groups, see Bourrinet 1999.

63 Enrico Russo (1895–1973), alias Candiani, was part of the 'Bordigist' fraction in France, until he split away in 1937. In Spain, he commanded the Lenin Column of the POUM's

a Fourth Communist International. Their perspective was to make contact with the POUM and the Trotskyist groups, in order to prepare a common conference.

This conference was quickly revealed as a total failure. The *Bulletin de liaisons* supposed to come out of it never saw the light of day. It proved impossible to adopt a joint resolution. The GIC noted this failure by underlining that 'the conditions for the beginning of an international discussion'<sup>64</sup> were lacking. The only result that appeared positive to the GIC was the establishment of contacts with the *Union Communiste*; and, above all, with Hennaut's LCI – by far the closest organisation to the Dutch. The LCI, which had initially upheld the necessity of a new revolutionary party, was increasingly influenced by the GIC, to the point of evolving more-or-less towards council-communism.

The GIC's ambiguous attitude sprang from the absence of any real critique – except on the question of the party – of the positions of the *Union Communiste* and the LCI regarding the war in Spain.<sup>65</sup> The GIC published without comment texts by *Union Communiste* and the LCI on this serious question: these texts, written after May 1937, certainly showed – under pressure of events in Barcelona – positions very close to those of the GIC. But it had no intention of working towards a regroupment with these groups, which would have demanded a precise evaluation of their politics and orientation.

Finally, events in Spain left the GIC very isolated. The disappearance after July 1937 of *Räte-Korrespondenz*, the GIC's only theoretical review in German, showed the international isolation of the Dutch council-communists, whose links with Mattick's American group were reduced to their most simple expression.

The only organisation with which the GIC would have been able to establish political links, by virtue of their close position on the events in Spain, was the Italian communist left. The 'councilist' vision of the GIC on the organisation question and its 'anti-Leninist' conception made this impossible.<sup>66</sup> But the

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foreign volunteers. In Paris, he joined Chazé's *Union Communiste*. Handed over by the Vichy authorities to the Mussolini government, he was sent to prison for five years. Freed in 1943, he became secretary of the Naples trade-union centre (*Camera del Lavoro*), and a member of the 'Montesanto' CP. He turns up later as a member of the Italian Social-Democratic Party, where he tried to animate a left-current. See Broué 1987.

64 'Die Pariser Konferenz', *Räte-Korrespondenz*, No. 22, July 1937.

65 From 1938, Hennaut's LCI was more and more influenced by the 'councilist' positions of the GIC, many of whose articles and even pamphlets it published, in Flemish, in its *Bulletin*.

66 The only polemic against the GIC and the IARV of Ghent (councilist), is found in *Communisme* No. 21. December 1938. The organ of the Belgian 'Bordigist' Fraction, linked to the Italian Fraction of *Bilan*, denounced the 'negative conception of the party' propa-



events in Spain had been a test for the GIC. Contrary to other 'councilist' elements, it neither oriented itself towards Trotskyism nor towards anarchism.<sup>67</sup>

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ated by the GIC and IARV: 'The GIC and IARV bring fresh proof that one can perfectly well display the will to fight opportunism and the dangers of treachery and, even so, fall into the worst opportunist empiricism in one's conception of organisation'. *Communisme* saw clear concessions to anarchism in the positions of the GIC: 'With their equivocal formulations, the comrades of the GIC give the clear impression of having inherited anti-state or anti-government, anti-centralist conceptions, which are the attributes of anarchism but cannot be those of communists'. Responding to the GIC, the Belgian Fraction underlined that '... the degeneration and treason of the party does not put its necessity in question, quite the contrary'. However, it noted that, although they refused to admit it, the GIC and its Belgian 'twin' in fact proposed a party-form of organisation of the party, but adulterated: 'It is really a question here, it seems to us, of the function and activity of the party, and the bodies in question do practically nothing other than propose solutions to the masses, but with a return to methods long since rejected by the workers' experience'. Finally, 'councilism' posed itself as external to the proletariat: 'When all is said and done, the vanguard will pose itself as a mere "advisor" of the masses. It does not identify itself with the proletariat, but will be juxtaposed to it'. One can note that this critique was fraternally addressed, and finally nuanced. It is very far from the sectarianism shown by the 'Bordigist' current after 1945–50 with regard to any political group situated to the left of Trotskyism in the revolutionary milieu.

- 67 From the councilist group of The Hague, one member, Rinus Pelgrom, became an anarchist, a member of the Amsterdam *Vrije groepen*, before joining the *De Vonk* group and then the Trotskyist CRM during the war (see Bot 1986, p. 28). Without joining it Cajo Brendel wrote in the anarchist journal *De Vrije Arbeider* of Anton Levien Constandse (1899–1985), leader of the Anarchist Federation, which in 1937, brought together all the anarchist groups. Constandse turned towards anti-fascism after Munich (see *De Gids*, 6 July 1969). Arrested by the Germans in October 1940, he was freed from the *lager* in 1944. Later a journalist for the *Algemeen Handelsblad*, he remained a prolific anarchist and 'freethinking' writer. From 1973 to 1983, he was editor of the anarchist periodical *De As* ('The Anarcho-Syndicalist'). He wrote a book dedicated to the anarchist movement of the 1920s–30s (with documents): Constandse 1975. See biography by Rudolf de Jong, in *BWN* 1989.



**PART 4**

*Council-Communism during  
and after the War (1939–68)*

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## From the ‘Marx-Lenin-Luxemburg Front’ to the *Communistenbond Spartacus* (1940–42)

### 1 The Dutch Council-Communists and the War

The war that the council-communists had judged inevitable broke out in September 1939. Nevertheless, it took the Dutch left two months to publish its theoretical review *Radencommunisme*, while its agitational review *Proletenstemmen* had ceased publication in July. The atmosphere of war weighed more heavily in the Netherlands – which remained neutral in the conflict – and seemed to paralyse the council-communists, as their organisation remained very slipshod and totally unprepared for clandestine work should they be forced underground.

Nevertheless, the first issue of *Radencommunisme* (November 1939), stood firm on its internationalist principles. Analysing the causes of the war, it refused to differentiate between the ‘democratic’ and ‘fascist’ camps. Adopting the analyses of revolutionaries during the First World-War, it concluded: ‘... it is world-capitalism, as an economic system, that is responsible for this war, and not any particular country’.

*Radencommunisme* showed that the unleashing of war by Germany had been made possible ‘by the concentration of all capital in the hands of the state’ and ‘by a growing exploitation of the working class’ in Germany. This phenomenon, according to this periodical, was identical in the ‘democratic’ camp, since ‘In a short space of time, England built up its own “totalitarian” capitalist organisation’.

As far as the military situation was concerned, the GIC judged it ‘unlikely’ that the Netherlands – like Belgium and Scandinavia – would remain ‘neutral’; without saying so explicitly, it suggested that the Netherlands could be occupied by either the Anglo-French or the German camp. In any case, ‘in a few years, the map of the world will be totally changed’ by the conflict. Refusing to forecast the victory of one or the other camps, it insisted that the peace, like the Peace of Versailles after the First World-War, would be devastating.

The international communists were equally cautious as to the outcome of the war. Revolutionary activity by the proletariat at the end of the conflict, as in 1917, was less a hypothesis than an ‘unknown quantity’: ‘It is certain that, after some years of war, a new, formidable social force will hinder the

war-plans of the capitalists, but we do not know what will be the extent or depth of its effects'.<sup>1</sup>

The GIC thought it certain that a revolutionary movement would arise in Germany. The disappearance of the 'old workers' movement' would leave room for movements of the masses. This would in some sense repeat the events of Germany 1918, but this time it would end with a victory of the proletariat.

Faced with war and the threat of the extension of military operations onto Dutch territory, the council communists seemed hesitant in undertaking their anti-war revolutionary propaganda. It is true that they had no desire to conduct a 'frontist' policy with Sneevliet's RSAP, which at the beginning of 1940 proposed the formation of an anti-war front (*Nederlands Anti-Oorlog Front*) bringing together syndicalists, anarchists and Trotskyists for common action. They refused to join up with this front.<sup>2</sup>

Up until the invasion of the Netherlands on 10 May 1940, agitation against war was undertaken by a few local 'councilist' currents. Thus the group of 's-Gravenhage? (The Hague) regularly brought out a bulletin with a significant title: *Soldatenbrieven* ('Soldiers' letters') with a resolutely anti-militarist content. Addressed to soldiers and workers, the October 1939 issue denounced any form of patriotism: 'We workers of every country want to live and struggle against our enemy in our own country, against Dutch capitalism'.<sup>3</sup>

The bulletin, distributed in some barracks, appealed to soldiers not to adhere to either of the two camps: that of 'private capital' (France, Britain, the Netherlands) or that of 'state-capital' (Russia, Germany, Italy). Conscious that the Netherlands were living through a precarious peace and that the extension of the conflict would reduce the country to 'smoking ruins', the militants proclaimed in the November issue: 'The war has begun, the revolution is coming'. They appealed to the proletariat of every country to struggle against all 'the parasitic institutions: state, Church, party or unions'.<sup>4</sup>

On 1 May 1940, a few days before the surprise invasion by the German army, the De Geer<sup>5</sup> government (1939–40), which included socialist (SDAP) ministers (Willem Albarda and Jan van den Tempel), banned all demonstrations; the state of siege was soon proclaimed in the Netherlands. The application of

1 GIC 1939, p. 2.

2 Perthuis 1976, pp. 414–15.

3 *Soldaten brieven*, No. 2, p. 3. The banner slogan read: 'the workers have no country'.

4 'De oorlog is begonnen, de revolutie komt', *Soldaten brieven*, No. 3, p. 3. The struggle must be undertaken in every country: 'For all the workers of the world, the enemy is in their own country, inside and not outside the national frontiers' (p. 2).

5 Dirk Jan de Geer (1870–1960).

Article 33 of a law of 1848 permitted arbitrary internment. This affected certain members of the Dutch Communist and Nazi parties. A few days later, the invasion ended with the occupation of the whole country. Soon Seyss-Inquart, nominated by Hitler, took over the administration. The Gestapo arrived, with a list of militants to arrest, including Sneevliet.<sup>6</sup>

## 2 The Political Work of Anton Pannekoek: *The Workers' Councils*

For several years, up to 1944, the militants of the 'councilist' movement remained silent. They only intervened individually in the strike of February 1941 (see below). Many of them, it is true, were being hunted by the Gestapo. Before the war, the Nazi government had demanded the extradition of Jan Appel.

Pannekoek himself managed to avoid being troubled during the occupation. Having 'officially' retired from political life in 1921, he had become an astronomer of international renown working as a research-professor at the University of Amsterdam. From 1941, he had begun to draw up the first chapters of the book that was to be published in 1946 under the title of *The Workers' Councils*.<sup>7</sup> These chapters show that Pannekoek did not give in to discouragement, and remained an indomitable adversary of capitalist society: 'Fighting the enemy, knowing his resources, his strengths and his weaknesses is necessary in any struggle. It is the one primordial condition that will permit us to avoid discouragement when we measure the forces of the enemy, and any illusions when we have gained a partial success'.<sup>8</sup>

Like many revolutionaries at the time – particularly the Italian internationalist left<sup>9</sup> – Pannekoek was convinced that the defeat of Germany was inevitable: 'The objective of the National-Socialist dictatorship, the conquest and domination of the world, makes it probable that it will be destroyed in the course of the very war that it unleashed with this aim ...'<sup>10</sup>

However, contrary to other revolutionary groups in France and Italy and unlike the MLL-Front (see below), Pannekoek did not think that revolution would arise from German defeat. He thought that history could not repeat itself

6 Previously, it was the Dutch police who had the task of arresting Sneevliet, who was in Belgium on 10 May.

7 The book came out under the pseudonym of P. Aartsz, in the 'De Vlam' editions, published by the *Communistenbond Spartacus*.

8 Pannekoek 1974a, p. 219.

9 Bourrinet 1999.

10 Pannekoek 1974a, p. 331.

and that Allied forces would do everything to prevent a new November 1918: '... contrary to the previous history of Germany in 1918, political power will not automatically fall into the hands of the working class. The victorious powers will not allow it: all their forces, if necessary, will serve in the repression'.<sup>11</sup>

The military defeat of National Socialism would clearly leave American capital dominant in Europe: '... the Allied armies will liberate Europe in order to permit its exploitation by American capitalism'.<sup>12</sup>

In fact, for the theoretician of the 'councilist' movement, the fate of the revolution was to be played out in the USA, and not in a Europe 'devastated, prey to chaos and misery, its productive apparatus, adapted to equipping the war, completely worn out, its land and inhabitants exhausted ... The working class in America will have to undertake the most difficult war against the capitalist world. This war will be decisive for its liberation and that of the entire world'.<sup>13</sup>

This being said, Pannekoek was far from underestimating the subjective conditions of the revolution in the USA, and in particular the factor of class-consciousness: 'The main weakness of the American working class is its bourgeois mentality, its total submission to bourgeois ideas, to the black art of Democracy. The workers will only be capable of disentangling themselves from capitalism the day that their spirits ascend to a more profound class-consciousness, the day they join together in a stronger class-unity and when they extend their horizons to a class-culture never before reached in the world'.<sup>14</sup>

As for the potential of the Russian proletariat following the war, he remained sceptical. In a chapter of his book, written in 1944, he noted that Russian state-capitalism had engendered 'extermination-camps for the workforce where millions of victims are crammed together in the plains and icy deserts of Siberia'.<sup>15</sup> He opined that the revolutionary impulse for the Russian workers would come from Central Europe, on condition that the workers of this region 'undergo a profound change in their mode of thought and in their determination', and, above all, could 'face the formidable material power of victorious world-capitalism' as much as the 'spiritual forces' of Bolshevism and nationalism.<sup>16</sup>

However, it was on Asia, and particularly Japan and China, that Pannekoek concentrated his attention. He was convinced that the end of the war would

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Pannekoek 1974a.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Pannekoek 1974a, p. 278.

<sup>15</sup> Pannekoek 1974a.

<sup>16</sup> Pannekoek 1974a, p. 376.



mark the dawn of a new era in these countries.<sup>17</sup> It was inevitable 'that the Japanese ruling class would succumb' faced with 'the colossal industrial resources of America'. This defeat would allow an exploitation of the Japanese workers 'under more modern forms' with the disappearance 'of feudal forms of oppression'.<sup>18</sup> Thus the installation of a more 'modern' capitalism would permit the proletariat of the 'Empire of the Rising Sun' to join the ranks of the world-proletariat: '... the Japanese working class will be able, on the same footing as their American and European class-fellows, to take part in the general fight for freedom'.<sup>19</sup>

Nonetheless, Pannekoek did not exclude the possibility that, following the defeat of Japan, 'with the collapse of repressive power, a revolution of the peasants and workers would break out'. This forecast of an Oriental 'November 1918' was to prove mistaken.

We see the same fascination for the Orient, as some regenerative soil for the 'old workers' movement', in the chapter on 'the rise of China'.<sup>20</sup> Not that Pannekoek was given to infatuation with the nationalist movement of Mao Zedong, whose partisans, 'under the cover of communist ideas and slogans ... are the heroes and champions of capitalist development in China'.<sup>21</sup> In fact, it was not 'the label under which a mode of thought or action is presented which determines its real content, but its class-character'. Despite the 'communist' label, the CCP remained a 'bourgeois organisation' in the same way as the *Kuomintang* of Chiang-Kai Shek.

Far from showing that the development of capitalism was impossible<sup>22</sup> in the backward parts of the world, given the decadence of the system – a theoretical analysis of many revolutionaries at the time – Pannekoek considered a Chinese bourgeois revolution possible. Without saying who would carry it out – Mao or Chiang – he believed in 'the accession of China to the status of a new capitalist world-power' through 'the intensification' of its 'economic development'.<sup>23</sup> This 'development' would be carried out under the direction of American capital, without that bringing about the installation of a 'democracy'.

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17 Pannekoek 1974a, p. 377.

18 Pannekoek 1974a.

19 Pannekoek 1974a, p. 344. Pannekoek was optimistic for the future: 'This war is one of the last convulsions in the irresistible process leading to the unification of humanity; the struggle that will result from it will make this unity a community led by itself' (p. 335).

20 Pannekoek 1974a, p. 344.

21 Pannekoek 1974a, pp. 344–5.

22 Pannekoek 1974a, pp. 347–59.

23 Pannekoek 1974a, pp. 356–7.

On the contrary, there would be 'a dictatorship at the level of central government, completed, perhaps, by a type of democratic autonomy at the level of the district or village'. In effect, this meant that the old system of despotism at a central level would co-exist with the more or less autonomous village-units.

These contradictory views on the evolution of Chinese capital did not call into question the role of the Chinese proletariat. More than a presumed 'development', Pannekoek expected 'a more rapid launching of a powerful movement of the working class than in Europe'.<sup>24</sup>

Remarkably, the council-communists' guide foresaw that the upheavals at the end of war would lead to 'decolonisation'. This, termed 'self-determination' in his book, would benefit the indigenous upper classes: 'In these countries, self-determination will not only be the prerogative of the upper classes; not only will their members insert themselves in the subordinate ranks of the colonial administration of yesterday, but they will end up occupying the leading positions, assisted, it goes without saying, by white advisers and specialists charged with ensuring that the interests of capital are served as necessary.'<sup>25</sup> Thus the proletariat of the colonies could struggle directly against its own national bourgeoisie, 'independently for [its] class-interests and for liberty, alongside the Western workers'.<sup>26</sup>

Such was the political vision of Pannekoek in 1944. Retiring in 1943, he devoted himself simultaneously to writing his *Memories of the workers' movement* and his *Memoirs of an Astronomer*.<sup>27</sup> Perhaps feeling that his life was

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24 The partisans of the 'Luxemburgist' theory of the decadence of capitalism – such as the French communist left, and before that the German and Dutch lefts, except Pannekoek – showed the impossibility of bourgeois revolutions in what would become the 'Third World'. After the war, on the other hand, Bordiga and his current tried hard to show that the 'revolt of the coloured peoples' would be the starting-point for a formidable development of the productive forces.

25 Pannekoek 1974a, pp. 358–9.

26 Pannekoek 1974a, p. 359.

27 Pannekoek's archives were collated after his death by B.A. Sijes. Sijes prepared the edition of *Herinneringen* ('Memories') published by Van Gennep in Amsterdam, 1982. *Herinneringen* was written by Pannekoek by candlelight because of the periodic power cuts. The 'Memoirs of an Astronomer' was left to his son and grandson. It is interesting to note that Pannekoek wrote his *Herinneringen uit de arbeidersbeweging* ('Memories of the workers' movement') with an activist concern:

'It is necessary that the new conception [of councils] little-by-little penetrates the masses: from this comes the need for a propaganda-literature that is easily readable and assimilated in its content. Clarification is the greatest force which makes the workers' revolution possible: without this conception, without this clarification any movement

in danger, with the proliferation of arrests and deportations in the occupied Netherlands, he wanted to leave to posterity a political, as well as a scientific, testament. However, these memoirs were only published nearly forty years later.

Towards the end of the war, he was equally isolated in writing the last chapters of *The Workers' Councils*. Pannekoek's retirement was not political. His hope for a revolutionary upsurge was dimmed. The end of the war strikingly demonstrated that capitalism was leading society 'to an inferior level of civilisation'.<sup>28</sup> In fact, this regression was a 'fall into barbarism'. Was this fall the expression of an economic system going into its phase of decline? Pannekoek did not answer, and refused to use the term 'decadence', doubtless because he still thought an 'intensive development' possible in Asia. In essence, the class-consciousness of the proletariat in the European countries seemed to have disappeared. The decline of the workers' movement accompanied that of Europe.

It is particularly interesting to note that this vision of the 'disappearance' of 'consciousness' was symmetrical to that of Vercesi around the same time, in the Italian Fraction in France.<sup>29</sup> The terms are almost identical:

*In this second world-war the workers' movement has fallen much deeper than in the first. In the First World-War, its weakness, so sharply in contrast with its former pride and boasting, manifested itself in that it was dragged along, and deliberately, of its own volition, following the bourgeoisie and converted into an underling of nationalism. This character persisted in the next quarter-century, with its idle talk and party-intrigue, despite gallant fighting in strikes that occurred. In the present war, the working*

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of revolt is deviated into a dead end or to failure. Our task must be the following: have a concern for good propagandist literature, and untiringly so, here in this country, but also in England, Germany and America. This book by P. Aartsz (written in 1941–2) must contribute to that' (Pannekoek 1982 p. 218).

28 Pannekoek 1974a, p. 368.

29 Vercesi wrote in 1944, 'The class has not existed socially for fifteen years'. The Bordigist Italian Fraction in Marseilles replied:

'Social existence cannot be the consciousness that a class has by itself of the place that it occupies in history of its historic mission. And furthermore, vanguard-organisation is engendered by historic evolution: its existence is justified historically and without interruption; at each moment there is a place for its existence ... [T]here cannot be stages of social disappearance of the class, nor a fading-away of the conditions for the existence of its political organism' (*Bulletin de discussion internationale*, No. 5, May 1944, p. 36).

*class has proven unable to exercise any ability to decide for itself what to do; it had already been incorporated into the national whole. As they are shuffled to and fro from factories and shops, uniformed and drilled, commanded to the fronts, mixed up with the other classes, all the essence of the former working class has disappeared. The workers have lost their class; they do not exist as a class any more; class-consciousness has been washed away in the wholesale submission of all classes under the ideology of big capital.*<sup>30</sup>

As so often in *The Workers' Councils*, the most clear-cut assertions are given nuance some lines later. This disappearance of the working class was true 'more particularly in Central Europe'; by contrast, 'in the Western countries, there remain sufficient class-feelings for the workers soon to take up the struggle for the transformation of the industry of war into the industry of peace'.<sup>31</sup> How was the working class going to experience re-birth with peace, and on what basis was the class-consciousness of the workers going to be re-formed, if it no longer existed? All these questions remained unanswered, unless he thought that class-consciousness was 'eclipsed', disappearing in war only to be re-born in times of peace. But, if such were the case, it became difficult to explain why the First World-War gave rise to revolution, which essentially showed the development of a class-consciousness concretised by the formation of workers' councils.

It is true that, for Pannekoek, the main thing was less to draw an assessment of the counter-revolution that had destroyed proletarian organisations than to see the way that the revolution would necessarily have to take in the distant future. The revolution, in fact, 'would not be the result of a few years, just a brief revolutionary combat. It is a historic process, which will cover a whole period, with its highs and lows, with its storms and calms';<sup>32</sup> but 'with a constant progression', he added.<sup>33</sup> Developed in three chapters of the book, the idea of the workers' councils was only really discussed and criticised in the 'councilist' movement after 1945. The same went for the question of the party, on which the movement was far from unanimously in agreement (see below). All these questions went beyond the immediate framework of the war, in order to open up and enlarge a theoretical vision of Marxism.

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<sup>30</sup> Pannekoek 1974a, p. 386.

<sup>31</sup> Pannekoek 1974a.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Pannekoek 1974a, p. 377, and the chapter on 'Thought'.

Pannekoek's activity during the war was theoretically independent.<sup>34</sup> It can be compared to that of Bordiga. For the first time in the history of the workers' movement, some recognised 'leading figures' abandoned all revolutionary activity within an organisation in order to withdraw into theoretical studies, even to dedicate themselves to their professional activity. Following from a distance the activity of the organisations claiming their orientation, they contributed to it on occasion – and this was much more true of Pannekoek than of Bordiga in the 1930s – but never underwent either exile or the illegality required for work as militants. Despite their fidelity to the revolutionary cause, they took refuge in the silence of their studies. Their contributions became personal and external to their movement.

The personal nature of Pannekoek's contribution allows for a better understanding of its limitations. Outside the factional struggle, he seemed – like Trotsky before the First World-War – to have a more serene and lucid view of the historic course followed by capitalism in these years of war. On the basis of his revolutionary experience, he could grasp the consequences of the war for the workers' movement: the confirmation of defeat, and not, as in 1917–18, the opening of a period of social upheaval. He understood that the end of the war would not mean the proletarian revolution in the colonies – which could only come from the developed countries, and, in the first place, according to him, the USA – but the domination of the indigenous bourgeoisie.

More ambiguous was his vision of a possible development in the backward regions, since described as the 'Third World', or as the 'developing countries'. Like Bordiga, he thought that these countries could become new economic and social poles. In some way the history of capitalism would repeat the nineteenth century. But whereas Bordiga supported the struggles of national liberation and 'coloured people'<sup>35</sup> – in the tradition of the Baku Congress<sup>36</sup> –

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34 It was with this independence of spirit that Pannekoek claimed: 'Through my material situation, made possible by a bourgeois position, scientific work and teaching in the service of bourgeois science, I was completely independent and without prejudice as regards the workers' movement; I had no duty to accomplish; I can calmly reorient myself and arm for a new, better and more general vision. Independence of existence is the condition for independence of thought. And that, perhaps, still can continue to bear fruit' (Pannekoek 1982 pp. 21–81).

35 See Bordiga 1979. Bordiga, however, unlike Pannekoek, left the Marxian framework behind when he substituted the concept of race and nation for that of class, exalting the 'revolt of coloured peoples' – 'black', 'yellow and olive' (sic) in the Third World.

36 See Riddell 1993. At the time the Dutch Communist Party, to which Pannekoek belonged, launched an appeal to the peoples of the Orient: 'Brother Hindus! [Indonesians] Join up

Pannekoek defended the principle of a workers' struggle for international social liberation.

The theory of consciousness defended in *The Workers' Councils* was contradictory. According to Pannekoek, the physical disappearance of the proletariat in the war was the reason for the disappearance of the 'class *for* itself' as a class conscious of its aims. For Pannekoek, the dominant idea was that class-consciousness could only be a reflection of the general consciousness of the class at a given moment (real consciousness or level of consciousness). Consequently, the smothering of this real immediate consciousness led to the disappearance of class-consciousness, as a political revolutionary consciousness. Since class-consciousness was not seen also as a product of revolutionary organisations, it could only exist as an individual consciousness: 'thought by oneself, a knowledge acquired by oneself of the method for determining what is true and right'.<sup>37</sup> Thus, class-consciousness, far from being a collective product, emerged through 'self-education ... through the intensive activity of each brain'. This made class-consciousness, as a generalised consciousness of the class, more the fruit of self-education than an in-depth maturation coming to the surface in the form of mass-movements.

Council-communist theory had a revolutionary impact in the Netherlands, developing within the organised framework of the Spartacus Communist Union. The positions of the GIC and of Pannekoek found an echo through this organisation, in tandem with its paradoxical development.

### 3 From the RSAP to the 'Marx–Lenin–Luxemburg Front' – The 'Third Front' against the War

The current that gave rise to the council-communist organisation 'Spartacus' emerged from Sneevliet's RSAP. This political transformation during the war is one of the most astonishing there could be.

The RSAP (Workers' Socialist Revolutionary Party)<sup>38</sup> represents the sole case of an electoralist party to the right of the Trotskyist movement evolving during a world-war towards revolutionary positions. Coming out of the Dutch Communist Party in 1927, the Sneevliet fraction was at the head of a small union, the NAS

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with your oppressed brothers of the Orient who, in their turn, revolt against the English capitalists, allied to your oppressors: the Dutch capitalists!' (p. 220).

37 Pannekoek 1974a, pp. 490–94.

38 For the history of the RSAP, besides Perthus 1976, see Pieterse 1977.

(*Nationaal Arbeids Secretariaat*), which refused to dissolve itself into the Social-Democratic NVV union. Becoming a party in 1929 (RSP, Revolutionary-Socialist Party), this tendency was closer to the Brandlerian right-wing tendencies in the Comintern than the lefts (Korsch, Schwarz, Bordiga) who left in 1926. Maring-Sneevliet's policy on China in the 1920s had been vigorously criticised by Trotsky for having contributed to the defeat of the revolution in 1926–7. The fusion in 1935 with a left-socialist organisation, the OSP (Independent Socialist Party) – led by Jacques de Kadt, P.J. Schmidt, Edo Fimmen,<sup>39</sup> Sal Tas and the elderly Frank van der Goes – which itself emerged from the Dutch Social Democracy in 1932, gave birth to the RSAP, the constant target of the council-communists.<sup>40</sup>

This small party, which initially had 3,600 members and still had 2,500 adherents in 1939, was based on the NAS union led by Sneevliet.<sup>41</sup> The NAS was the union-base of the RSAP, with 22,500 members in 1933; by 1939, after state-employees had been forbidden to join the NAS, the figure had fallen to 10,500. Born in 1893, the NAS maintained a revolutionary-sindicalist orientation; it joined the Red International of Trades-Unions in 1925, and left in 1927 when the Comintern gave the order for it to dissolve itself into the official Social-Democratic union, the NVV. All those members of the Dutch CP who had joined the NAS followed Sneevliet in the split.

Politically, the RSAP oscillated between left-socialism and Trotskyism. Before 1935, the two organisations RSP and OSP pronounced themselves – with Willy Brandt's SAP and the International Left-Opposition (Bolshevik-Leninist) – for the formation of new parties and the creation of a new International.<sup>42</sup> In 1935, the RSAP, together with other organisations, declared itself for the rapid construction of the Fourth International.<sup>43</sup> This position, along with others

39 Edo Fimmen was secretary of the Transport-Workers' International (TWI) until his death in 1942. See Buschak 2002.

40 See GIC 1935. The unification-congress took place in Rotterdam, and not Amsterdam, as incorrectly stated in Tichelman 1974. This is shown by Stan Poppe's interesting testimony in *Spartacus* No. 2, 1975.

41 See Perthus 1976, pp. 370–71. Perthus gives the figure of 3,000 militants for the left-socialists of the OSP in 1935, and 1,000 for Sneevliet's RSP. The RSP was thus a minority in the RSAP; it is true that a pro-SAP split in November 1935 led to the departure of 1,000 militants, mostly ex-OSP. Sneevliet was secretary of the RSAP, and P.J. Schmidt (1896–1952) – ex-leader of the OSP – its president. The latter abandoned his position and left the party in August 1936, during the Moscow Trials. A year later, he returned to the SDAP. Henceforth, the weight of the OSP was lesser.

42 'Declaration of the Four', 26 August 1933 (*The Militant*, 23 September 1933).

43 See Broué (ed.) 1979b. The 'Open letter to organisations and groups of the revolution-

such as the union question, led some militants to leave the RSAP and form the BRS (Socialist-Revolutionary League) linked to the SAP. The break with the SAP was complete, but not the break with left-socialism. In fact, in 1936, Sneevliet gave his support to the POUM in Spain, which had recently entered the Catalan government. The same year, he took a position against Trotsky's policy of 'entryism' into the socialist parties.

In 1937 the split between the RSAP and Trotsky gradually came to fruition. Much like his attitude towards the POUM, Trotsky reproached Sneevliet for keeping the NAS alive. Trotsky insisted that the NAS be dissolved into the Socialist union, the NVV. Accusing the NAS of receiving financial support from the Dutch government<sup>44</sup> and Sneevliet of being irresponsible,<sup>45</sup> Trotsky concluded:

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ary proletariat' (June 1935) appealed to 'all the parties, organisations, fractions in the old parties and the unions, all the associations and revolutionary workers' groups in agreement with the principle of preparation and of the construction of a Fourth International to put their signature to this letter'. Apart from the RSAP, it was signed by the Workers' Party of the USA, the International Secretariat of Trotsky's ICL, the Bolshevik-Leninist group of the SFIO and the Workers' Party of Canada.

- 44 Trotsky claimed that 'the NAS only exists because it is tolerated and financially supported by the bourgeois government'. In this letter addressed to Sneevliet, he added: 'This financial support depends on your political attitude' (Trotsky 1983, p. 342.) Sneevliet was one of the rare militants with whom Trotsky was friendly. Vereeken thought that the accusations against Sneevliet were the work of Rudolf Klement and the Belgian Trotskyists. For his point of view, see Vereeken 1976. The German Trotskyist R. Klement was Trotsky's secretary in Turkey and France; kidnapped by the GPU, his headless body was fished out of the Seine in July 1938.

Nevertheless, the NAS was given money by the Dutch government to be paid to the unemployed who were members of the NAS. In Twente, the local administrator of the NAS, who was a high-ranking member of the RSAP, used part of this money to cover debts that the NAS was suffering. There was a trial about this in Twente. Partly because of this, the government stopped paying the unemployed through the unions. This is one of the major reasons why the membership of the NAS declined dramatically towards the end of the 1930s.

- 45 Trotsky accused Sneevliet of sabotaging the 'Amsterdam Bureau' of the Fourth International, and of contributing through lack of due caution to the death of Ignace Reiss, an official high up in the GPU who had gone over to Trotskyist positions and was, in consequence, assassinated by the Stalinists in September 1937. Suspicious of the people around Trotsky's son Sedov, Victor Serge and Sneevliet had sought a meeting with Reiss. Unknown to him, Sedov's entourage did, indeed, include a GPU agent who caused his death: this agent was only unmasked after the war.



... If you continue to adopt the same totally ambiguous position – with the Fourth International in words, against it in fact – then an open and honest split would be better. In this case, you will remain with the NAS and us with the Fourth International. We are creating a section in Holland and will try to build through open struggle what we have been unable to create through patient collaboration and discussion between comrades.<sup>46</sup>

This ultimatum led to a total break in 1938. Soon, a Dutch Trotskyist group was created – the GBL (or Bolsheviek-Leninist Group) – composed in part of ex-members of the RSAP.

Until the war, the RSAP barely differentiated itself from the left-socialist parties. The party took part in parliamentary elections. In 1935, Sneevliet and P.J. Schmidt – the latter being a leader of the old OSP and the vice-president of the RSAP – were elected MPs, at the same time as two other leaders of their organisation. In the same year, the RSAP won 23 seats in the municipal elections. Although it lost its parliamentary seats in the general election of 1937, the RSAP had more success in 1939, in the municipal and general elections, where Sneevliet was elected a councillor for Amsterdam and for the provincial states in the north of Holland.<sup>47</sup>

This electoral activity attracted the sarcasm of Trotsky – even though Trotskyist organisations adopted an identical policy. It was combined with a political united front with left-socialism. In September 1938, the RSAP took the initiative of forming, together with Marceau Pivert's PSOP (Socialist Workers' and Peasants' Party), an International Workers' Front against the war – *Internationaal Arbeiders Front* or IAF – that soon brought together 15 organisations, including that of Brandler and of Vereeken.<sup>48</sup> The Front's *Manifesto* called on workers to struggle against the war; and if the war broke out, to finish with capitalism through revolution.

It was, in fact, the question of war, and consequently the attitude of the RSAP towards Russia, that profoundly transformed the RSAP, at the price of a radical change of programme, then of orientation on all its programmatic positions. Sneevliet's change of position on the Russian question was to prove decisive,

46 Trotsky 1983, p. 343.

47 Note that Sneevliet's candidature was supported by a *Revolutionair Anti-Oorlogs Comité* (Anti-War Revolutionary Committee). Among them was Abraham Korper, who had been one of the founders of the KAPN and a leader of the group *De Arbeidersraad* in the 1930s.

48 Georges Vereeken (1898–1988) led the group *Contre le Courant* in Belgium, which refused to link up with the official Trotskyist current. He was the personal friend of Sneevliet and had ties with the Frank-Molinier group.

given the fact that he dominated the RSAP and the NAS with his powerful personality and all his authority.<sup>49</sup>

In 1935, the party-programme took a position for the defence of the USSR in the case of war. The crushing of the Barcelona workers by the Communist Party in May 1937, followed by the Moscow Trials, increased Sneevliet's doubts as to the validity of this point in the programme.

In December 1939, the RSAP held its last conference. Due to the Hitler-Stalin Pact, the point on the defence of the USSR was scratched from the party's programme: '... the alliance between Germany and Russia has practically rendered useless the paragraph concerning the duty to defend the Soviet Union'. 'No-one now claims that if Russia finds itself engaged in war, the duty of the international working class is to unconditionally support the USSR'.<sup>50</sup>

The resolution that removed this point from the programme was adopted by 806 mandates against 18. In fact, it was more out of anti-fascism than internationalism that the non-defence of the USSR was proclaimed. This was an ambiguity that still had to be settled.

Among the leaders of the organisation, only Willem Dolleman disagreed.<sup>51</sup> With others, he went on to represent the Trotskyist vision in the MLL-Front after 22 June 1941.

The Russian-Finnish War again posed the question of the defence of the USSR and that of the 'right of peoples to self-determination'. Some militants, such as Hendrik van Driesten (1911–44), proposed forming a front of the world-proletariat against Russian intervention without allying with the Finnish bourgeoisie. Others criticised this position, which could appear as supporting the Finnish bourgeoisie, and denounced as opportunist Lenin's slogan of 'self-determination'. Implicitly denounced was any slogan favouring a struggle for 'national liberation'.<sup>52</sup>

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49 Sneevliet had the reputation of being very authoritarian in the RSAP. His written contributions, and in particular his theses on organisation were innumerable.

50 Quoted by Bot 1983. The paragraph mentioned and the result of the vote can be found in *De Nieuwe Fakkel*, 22 December 1939. (English translation: 'Generals Without Troops, Dutch Trotskyism during the Occupation', in *Revolutionary History*, Vol. 1, No. 4, London, Winter 1988–9.)

51 Most of Trotsky's supporters left the RSAP in 1938. The remainder left the following year.

52 The Belgian Trotskyists who published *Correspondance internationale* asserted, in their Issue 14 of 15 December 1939: 'the RSAP has pushed equivocation to the limit, in organising collections for the Finnish people so that money can be sent to Finnish working-class organisations!'

Without engaging in a theoretical debate on the nature of the USSR, which would have led to the formation of antagonistic tendencies, the RSAP prepared for illegality in 1938 convinced that the war would not spare Dutch neutrality and that it was necessary to 'strengthen the struggle against imperialist war'.<sup>53</sup>

In May 1940, the German army invaded the Netherlands, which capitulated after six days of fighting. Sneevliet, who was in Belgium, returned in order to continue the struggle underground. The RSAP ceased to exist. In its place, an illegal organisation was established: the Marx-Lenin-Luxemburg Front. At first, it comprised 4,600 members, as against 2,500 in the RSAP. Clandestinity demanded a rigorous selection of reliable militants. In order to confront repression, the MLL-Front was built on a system of cells of five members, divided up and led by men of confidence who linked up vertically and horizontally with the illegal leadership and other cells. The double organisation disappeared: the NAS was liquidated in September. The RSAP became the second-largest illegal political organisation in the Netherlands, and even the largest if one takes into account the fact that the Dutch CP could maintain a semi-legal status for several months due to the German-Soviet Pact.<sup>54</sup>

A central committee of nine members was set up. It included Sneevliet, Menist, Dolleman, Gerritsen, de Haan-Zwagerman, Jan Koeslag, Pieter van 't Hart – known as Max Perthus (1910–75) – Jan Schrieffer and Stan Poppe;<sup>55</sup> the latter went on to play a decisive role in the creation of the *Spartacusbond*. Sneevliet was the uncontested leader, writing almost all the political positions of the Front. At his side, Ab(raham) Menist – of Jewish origin – was a born organiser; Dolleman was the treasurer and responsible for publications.

Under the management of this central committee an external bulletin was regularly published (*Het MLL Bulletin*) as well as an internal organ (*Richtlijnen*; 'Directives'). For a while, the MLL-Front made propaganda directed at SDAP militants and published 'Letters to the Social Democrats' (*Brieven aan Sociaal-Democraten*). The SDAP was denounced as the 'Judas of the workers' movement', after it took part in a Dutch union that brought together liberals, religious parties and social democrats in July 1940.<sup>56</sup> This union proclaimed its allegiance

53 Bot 1983, p. 11.

54 Outlawed by the Dutch government, the CPN published its periodicals, *Volksdagblad* and *Politiek en Cultuur* legally up to the end of June 1940 under German occupation. In the periodical *Politiek en Cultuur* ('Vijf historische dagen', June 1940, pp. 321–5), Paul de Groot called for a 'correct attitude' vis-à-vis the German occupation-army.

55 Pseudonym: T. Woudstra.

56 Bot 1983 p. 25. A very small part of the Dutch Social Democracy supported the German camp and collaborated with it, for example the '*Troelstra Beweging Nederland*' (Troelstra

to the bourgeois monarchy of the House of Orange and hoped that German domination in Europe would allow the Netherlands to keep Indonesia as a colony. The SDAP was not banned by the new Nazi régime for several months. Many of the SDAP opposition who criticised their party chose another camp: the British.

This policy of forcing the SDAP rank-and-file to confront the consequences of their party's positions for social and political reality brought a certain number of them into the MLL-Front. The Front did not adopt the same policy towards the CPN. 'Stalinism is fascism in its worst form', it wrote.<sup>57</sup>

It should be noted that in its bulletins, the MLL-Front did not pronounce on the class-nature of the Socialist or Communist parties. Its propaganda towards these parties, towards the SDAP in particular, showed that it still considered them as a part of the 'workers' movement'. In this sense, the Front remained the continuation of the pre-war RSAP. But it was already differentiating itself both from the Trotskyist parties and from the left-socialists by its refusal to support either the 'democratic' camp or that of the USSR. Its action was oriented as much against the Dutch bourgeoisie as the German.

To the two imperialist fronts, the MLL-Front counterposed the Third Front (*Derde Front*), that of the proletariat: 'The MLL-Front wants the insurrection of the proletariat in the warring countries and the fraternisation of soldiers and workers through the struggle against the imperialist powers which has led them into this war. Such is the "Third Front" propagated in the writings of the MLL-Front'.<sup>58</sup>

This policy of the Front led the MLL to link up – at the end of 1940 – with the *Vonk Groep* ('Spark group') formed by Jef Last (1898–1972), Tom Rot (1909–82), Dirk Schilp (1893–1969), and left pacifist-socialists, including many artists and intellectuals, such as Henriëtte Roland Holst. With the agreement of Sneeveliet and the central committee, the group was led by Eddy Wijnkoop, a nephew of David Wijnkoop and member of the MLL-Front who died in the Mauthausen camp in 1944. Publishing the illegal monthly *De Vonk*, it defended the same point of view as the Marx-Lenin-Luxemburg Front.

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Movement-Netherlands, or TBN – named after an old leader of the SDAP, and led by Paul Kiès). P. Kiès (1895–1968) had in 1926 been the first regular army-officer member of the SDAP. An active agitator and journalist for the SDAP, he had built his own movement in 1938, which had a militant basis in Friesland, and in order to 'get the best from the SDAP and the CPN'. After May 1940, Kiès became a Nazi collaborator. Arrested and imprisoned in May 1945, he was freed in 1959. See *BWSA* 1998, pp. 108–13.

57 Bot 1983, p. 31.

58 Perthus 1976, pp. 430–31.

This 'broad' policy towards other organisations underlined the ambiguity of the organisation's orientation, and its difficulty in defining itself as an autonomous internationalist current. The fact that, during the same period, the left-socialists of the BRS and the Trotskyists of the GBL asked to merge with it – a request which was rejected in both cases – only confirmed this.<sup>59</sup>

Two events precipitated the political evolution of the MLL-Front: the strike of February 1941 and the German attack on Russia on 22 June 1941.

#### 4 The Strike of February 1941 and Its Political Consequences

The February Strike (*Februaristaking*) was provoked both by the German authorities' persecution of the Jews as well as the growing discontent of Dutch workers subjected to great material poverty and deportations to the factories of the *Reich*.<sup>60</sup>

*Reich*-Commissioner Seyss-Inquart had already adopted anti-Semitic measures by the end of 1940, with the support of Mussert's NSB (National-Socialist Union), a small Dutch Nazi party. All officials of Jewish origin were forbidden any promotion; jobs in the public sector were forbidden to Jews. These measures led to student-strikes in Delft and Leiden. Despite these, the occupying authorities and the Dutch Nazis continued their persecution of the sizeable Jewish population of Amsterdam. They were excluded from cafés and cinemas and from 1941 they were forced to register on a special list.

The movement in protest against anti-Semitism – which shocked the whole Dutch population – was, at first, largely the work of the students. They showed their hostility to anti-Semitism from a nationalist viewpoint, demonstrating on 31 January in schools and in the streets to celebrate the birthday of Princess Beatrix, exiled in London. The June 1940 bombardment of Rotterdam, which

59 Bot 1983, p. 28.

60 For a serious history of the February Strike, see Sijes 1954. Sijes, an ex-member of the GIC, played a major role in the strike when he was a docker in Amsterdam. At the time of the debacle of the German army, he and some comrades took hold of the archives of the police and German authorities before they were destroyed. Sent to the Royal Institute of Documentation on the War (*Rijksinstituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie*), they allowed him to work at the Institute and write his book, which came out in 1954. The conclusion of the English blurb written in the 1960s, shows that Sijes was far from his positions of the 1930s and 1940s: '... the February Strike not only gave the strikers a new-found feeling of self-confidence; it was a brilliant example for the whole population of Holland' (p. 228).

caused the death of 30,000 people, along with food-shortages, developed a strong anti-German feeling among the population.

For the MLL-Front, it was particularly important that the – legitimate – hostility to anti-Semitism should not lead to the exacerbation of Dutch-nationalist and pro-British feeling. The struggle against anti-Semitism could only take place in the general struggle against the whole of the capitalist system.

In its intervention, the MLL-Front called for a boycott of establishments that showed hostility to Jews, although it was conscious that a general boycott was hardly likely. It took care that the struggle was not against anti-Semitism alone, and called on Jews to struggle for socialism; it recalled that the liberation of Jews was only possible under socialism, and denounced Zionism as a dangerous aspiration to a national state as part of the capitalist world.<sup>61</sup>

At the same time as a profound hostility was developing towards the anti-Semitic measures, so too was the discontent of the workers growing. Unemployment hit them particularly hard: in Amsterdam there were 40,000 unemployed in August 1939 and 60,000 in July 1940, as many as in the worst years of crisis. Unemployment affected 300,000 workers in the Netherlands as a whole. In one year, the price of basic foodstuffs rose by more than 36 percent, deepening the general poverty still further.

Unemployed workers were increasingly subjected to a system of 'workfare' (*Werkverschaffing*). For a miserable wage, they had to participate in land-clearance or reinforcing dykes. In October 1940, there were 11,000 workers making the return-journey by train from Amsterdam to the province of Utrecht. Some workers' demonstrations and clashes with the authorities broke out from the month of November. Throughout January small demonstrations of 'assisted' and unemployed workers broke out, in protest against the labour-exchange and the Amsterdam municipal administration. Each of these was dispersed by the Dutch police.

At the same time, the first deportations of workers to Germany began, through the intermediary of the Dutch authorities, in particular the Amsterdam labour-exchange: 7,000 in October 1940. In January 1941 – on the orders of the German *Kriegsmarine* – 3,000 had to leave for Germany under the threat of being sent to the concentration-camps. These were skilled engineering- and shipbuilding-workers. A great agitation among the workers in the shipyards followed in mid-February.

In this increasingly tense social atmosphere, the German authorities began to take more rigorous anti-Semitic measures. The attacks of Dutch and German

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61 Bot 1983, p. 39.

Nazis against the Jewish quarter of Amsterdam, in the centre of the town, became pogroms from December. Faced with these attacks, on 11 February 1941, a group of Nazis was attacked by Jewish and non-Jewish workers who came from other workers' districts. These scuffles led to the death of a Dutch National Socialist.

On 12 February, the German authorities surrounded the whole Jewish district. They demanded that Jewish personalities form a *Joodenraad* (Jewish Council) responsible for the 'maintenance of order' and charged it with 'giving up' its weapons. Since the weapons were non-existent, there was no result. It was only a pretext to transform the district into a ghetto and carry out searches.

On 17 February, 2,000 shipyard-workers took the initiative by going on strike in solidarity with 128 comrades forced to work in Germany. The German authorities gave way and the workers obtained a moral victory, which later played a significant role in the generalisation of the strike.<sup>62</sup>

Following one incident, where a Jewish café-owner resisted the assaults of the German police (*Grüne Polizei*), the authorities arrested more than 400 young Jews on the weekend of 22–23 February. They were deported to Buchenwald some time later. The deployment of a force of SS machine-gunners provoked the emotion and anger of the workers of Amsterdam.

On 25 February, the strike broke out spontaneously in Amsterdam's workplaces. Some demonstrations took place to the cry of: 'Down with pogroms against the Jews!' On 26 February, the mass-strike spread to The Hague, Rotterdam, Groningen, Utrecht and Hilversum, Haarlem, and many other towns. The strike even spread to Belgium.<sup>63</sup>

The repressive measures taken by the German authorities were terrible: SS battalions were stationed in the strike-hit towns and ordered to fire on demonstrations; employers were ordered not to pay workers for the two-day strike. The strike-movement was broken. Executions of strikers began. The arrests of Jews continued and intensified during the summer of 1942. At the end of the war, out of a community of 120,000, only 20,000 survived, having judiciously chosen to go underground with forged papers.

It is certain that the Dutch CP – outlawed on 20 July 1940, two months after the beginning of the occupation – played a major role in starting the strike. But it was surprised by how quickly it spread. Its development outside of Amsterdam occurred spontaneously. When the CPN called for a general strike

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62 Sijes 1954.

63 The extension of the strike to Belgium (in Flanders) is attested to by Sijes, but he gives no details.

in the whole country for 6 March, its appeal was ignored by the workers. The strike had taken a mass-character, comparable in breadth with the great mass-strike of 1903. The mass-, spontaneous character of the strike – as opposed to a general strike – was not lost on the MLL-Front, whose positions were more and more ‘Luxemburgist’.

The MLL-Front played a considerable role in the strike, despite being reduced to a small organisation of some 300 militants.<sup>64</sup> Like the old organisations, they had formed a youth-group, the MJC (‘Young Marxists Committee’) which edited a monthly publication: *Het Kompas* (‘The Compass’). Since January 1941, it had produced a regular propaganda-newspaper, *Spartacus*, which ran to 5,000 copies in February. It had the largest circulation of any illegal paper.<sup>65</sup> The title chosen expressed an explicit political reference to Rosa Luxemburg. The fact that Sneevliet himself translated the *Junius Pamphlet, The Crisis of Social Democracy*, showed an evident distancing from Lenin on the national question.

Before the strike, the MLL-Front distributed much literature (leaflets, manifestos) calling for struggle. Propagandistically, it called workers to form defence-groups in their districts against anti-Semitic actions. At the time of the anti-Jewish raids it launched the following appeal:

If men and women of the workers’ districts rouse themselves in the Jewish district of Amsterdam ... if they undertake a struggle against the bandits hired by the Dutch National-Socialist movement, then we will see a magnificent demonstration of spontaneous solidarity which will appear in the factories under a superior and more effective form.

Respond to all acts of National-Socialist violence through agitation and protest strikes in the factories.

Come out *en masse* from the factories, leave work and join up *en masse* with class-comrades in struggle in the threatened districts.<sup>66</sup>

The impact of the MLL-Front in the strike in Amsterdam is hard to judge, although the NAS had 400 members there before the occupation. It is certain that, although the CPN took the initiative in calling the strike – in a situation of social agitation which was unfolding independently of it – the MLL-Front played an important role in spreading the strike to other towns. But,

64 The figure of 150 militants is given by Sijes. It seems more probable – according to Wim Bot – that it was around 325. There were between sixty and seventy cells of five members.

65 Perthuis 1976, p. 432.

66 The photograph of this appeal can be found in Sijes 1954.



above all, the strike was wanted and led by the workers, independent of all the parties' slogans.

At the end of the strike, the MLL-Front, while denouncing the CPN call for a strike on 6 March, advocated the formation of strike- and action-committees in the factories.<sup>67</sup>

The strike-wave – contrary to the great mass-strikes of the past – had not produced strike-committees leading the struggle. The February Strike was spontaneous, without the spontaneous creation of specific workers' organisms.

If there was a tendency in the MLL-Front to overestimate the revolutionary character of a strike which was at no time based on the workers' own demands, its rejection of nationalism showed that it did not underestimate the necessity of a struggle against the ideology of national resistance. If it were not to appear as a component of the national front of anti-German resistance, it had to underline the necessity for internationalism. That is what it did. The appeal we quote here is unambiguous:

How to struggle?  
Germany? No!  
England? No!  
The Third Front, the socialist proletariat.  
Against National Socialism and national Bolshevism!  
The international class-struggle!

The tone of this manifesto broke with that of the CPN which in its call to strike mixed anti-Nazi and nationalist slogans, such as: 'Struggle proudly for the liberation of our country!!!'<sup>68</sup>

The MLL-Front never advanced anti-fascist slogans. Contrary to the Dutch Social-Democratic groups, who made anti-fascism the 'first stage' in the struggle for socialism, it insisted on one unique stage: the struggle against capitalism everywhere in the world.<sup>69</sup>

It was in this spirit that the *Derde Front* developed a whole set of propaganda among German soldiers; this was very dangerous, since in Rotterdam some leaflets were distributed inside the barracks. The propaganda neither developed a call for the defence of democracy, nor an appeal for pacifism. In the *Manifesto of May 1*, in German, one could read:

67 The MLL-Front denounced the CPN as unworthy of carrying the red flag of socialism by dint of its support for Stalin, murderer of revolutionaries, and for Hitler. See Bot 1983, p. 47.

68 The leaflet of the CPN is quoted in Sijes 1954.

69 See Bot 1983, p. 52.

The popular masses have no interest in a victory for Britain. Similarly, they have no interest in a victory for Germany. They must take their own destiny in their hands. They are the Third Front, which can and must conquer!

Down with the war, but also down with capitalist peace! World peace can only be obtained through the victory of international socialism.<sup>70</sup>

## 5 The Rejection of Defence of the USSR – The Break with Trotskyism

The outbreak of war between Germany and the USSR plunged Sneevliet's movement into profound disarray. This disarray was further accentuated by the preventative arrest by the German police of militants or ex-members of the RSAP and of the NAS, on the night of 24–25 June. Their underground-work remained undiscovered, and the clandestine network was hardly touched.

Greater still was the disorientation provoked by the attack of the German army on 22 June; something which Sneevliet had not expected, since the title of his article in the previous issue of *Spartacus* was 'Stalin, toady of the Germans': This disarray had deeper roots. Despite the slogan against 'national Bolshevism', the MLL-Front had no theoretical position on the USSR. In its press, it implicitly adopted Trotskyist concepts of 'bureaucracy' and the 'parasitic caste', which it used to define the Russian state. It had a choice between taking Trotsky's analysis of the Russian state and calling for the defence of the 'workers' state', or of rejecting it and calling for the struggle against both imperialisms.

Little-by-little, the MLL-Front took a position against the defence of the USSR. Its 'Manifesto' of 23 June still half-defended the USSR in the war: '... the Russian proletariat must not only preserve what is left of the revolution'; it must also 'at the international level, transform the 'devastating war between nations' into a civil war'.<sup>71</sup>

Behind this position lay the influence of Dolleman and Perthus.

In a second position, Sneevliet made his own views felt, using the arguments of Rosa Luxemburg on the possibility of a revolutionary defensive war: 'Hitlerism and Stalinism dig their own graves in this war. The Russian workers must

70 'Der Maitag in Kriegszeit', address 'to the German comrades'. The 'Manifesto' is on p. 445 of Perthus 1976.

71 'Aan de Nederlandse arbeiders, boeren en intellectuelen' ('To the workers, peasants and intellectuals of Holland'), supplement to *Spartacus*, No. 10.

resist the fascist invasion, but they can only turn the war into a war of revolutionary defence if they destroy the Stalinist régime'.<sup>72</sup>

Finally, at the end of July, they made the jump. The MLL-Front rejected any defence of the USSR. The war in Russia had shifted the imperialist front. The central-committee thesis published in *Spartacus* took a clear position on the nature of the USSR. Russian society had taken on a state-capitalist character; the power of the workers had been liquidated. A totalitarian state had been born with a bureaucratic caste at its head; the USSR was a plaything of the big imperialist powers. The conclusion was an unambiguous appeal to internationalism:

The Third Front sees no reason to change its position with the new phase of imperialist war. It does not take sides with either of the two fronts in the imperialist war. It remains independent in how it defines its conduct: to stick by its own class-interests and undertake its own struggle. The German-Russian war is a subdivision of the second imperialist war.<sup>73</sup>

Of the nine members of the central committee, two voted against: Dolleman and Van 't Hart (Max Perthus), supporters of the Trotskyist position of 'unconditional defence' of the USSR. The arrest of Perthus on 15 August reduced the number of partisans of this position in the leadership. Dolleman (1894–1942) based himself on the youth-periodical *Het Kompas*, which published the minority-position; the issue was not distributed.<sup>74</sup> In order to avoid a split that now appeared inevitable, on 15 October 1941 Sneevliet – supported by Stan Poppe and Ab Menist – prohibited discussion on the defence of the USSR.<sup>75</sup> This ban was lifted at the end of the year. The majority around Sneevliet was strengthened by the support of Vereeken's 'Against the current' (*Contre le Courant*) group in Belgium, with whom a common manifesto against the war had been drawn up in December.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>72</sup> 'Brieven aan een jeugdvriend', No. 14, July 1941.

<sup>73</sup> *Spartacus*, No. 12, beginning of August, 1941.

<sup>74</sup> Subsequently, the youth-movement of the MLL-Front was dissolved. The young militants were individually integrated into the Front.

<sup>75</sup> Bot 1983, pp. 62–3. After the vote, Dolleman sent a letter of resignation to the central committee, protesting against the rejection of the 'freedom of democratic discussion'.

<sup>76</sup> The 'Manifesto' appeared in the 2 January 1941 *Tegen de stroom* organ of the Vereeken group. Vereeken secretly moved to Amsterdam where with Sneevliet he drew up the appeal 'to the workers of every country'. It called for the transformation of all the wars into a civil war. It concluded with a call for 'the new International of the proletariat' and 'mass-

As against the Trotskyist current of Dolleman, a partisan of the defence of the USSR 'arms in hand', the council-communist current around Stan Poppe asserted itself more and more.<sup>77</sup> Supported by Sneevliet, the latter took to settling accounts with Trotskyist ideology. In an article he denounced Trotsky's positions as 'dubious and unreal'. Socialism was not the violence of the Stalinist state, 'state-socialism', but the power of the workers' councils. The USSR was imperialist.<sup>78</sup>

In another article, Poppe identified with the communist positions of Gorter, citing his book *Open letter to comrade Lenin*. He upheld the book's principal theses:

- in Western Europe the role of the masses would be greater than the role of the leaders;
- the union-organisations had to be replaced by factory-organisations;
- parliamentarism would have to be rejected and fought against.<sup>79</sup>

This evolution was shown in practice through an appeal from the MLL-Front to desert the unions and form factory-committees. The break with the old union-policy was a break with the old policies of the RSAP. After the 'normalisation' of the Socialist NVV union by the German authorities in July 1940, the MLL-Front had incited its members to work inside it. The NVV had become a front for Mussert's NSB. The propaganda in July 1941 in favour of leaving the union-movement concluded a whole process of development. Instead of a union, the non-permanent form of 'struggle-committees' in the factories was advocated.

The sole position of the Third International since the Second Congress which remained intact was that of support for national-liberation struggles. The influence of Sneevliet on this point – he had been a militant in Indonesia

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action under the leadership of the proletarian strike-committees'. For a year, on the word of a young Belgian Trotskyist, Sneevliet thought that Vereeken defended British imperialism. Through contacts and an exchange of letters, he was convinced of the contrary. The international contacts of the MLL-Front went through the Vereeken group, which was closely linked to the *Comité communiste internationaliste* (CCI) or 'Internationalist Communist Committee' of Pierre Frank (1906–84) and Raymond Molinier (1904–94).

77 See Bot 1983, pp. 67–8.

78 'Verdediging van de Sovjet-Unie?' ('Defence of the Soviet Union?'), in *Tijdsproblemen*, No. 2, February 1942.

79 See Bot 1983, p. 70. Poppe showed that the struggle in the factories had to be political and transform itself into a struggle for power: 'In this period we are no longer talking about committees, but directly of councils'.

and China – remained preponderant. However, while an appeal was launched in the Front's press for the separation of Indonesia and the Netherlands, it had nothing to do with the anti-imperialism that led to support for the local nationalist leadership. The MLL-Front defended the positions of the Second Congress of the Comintern, and not those of the Baku Congress. It proclaimed that the struggle for national liberation was only possible inasmuch as it combined with the socialist revolution in the developed capitalist world.

## 6 The Decapitation of the MLL-Front Leadership (1942)

By the beginning of 1942, the MLL-Front had travelled a long road. Theoretically, it had broken with the old RSAP. Politically, it had made the choice of isolation in order to defend revolutionary principles. This isolation inevitably led to splits both within the MLL-Front, and outside in the milieu which it influenced. It broke with its sympathisers of *De Vonk*, which after 22 June 1941 advocated support for the Allied camp as the 'lesser evil'.<sup>80</sup>

But it was in Spring 1942 that repression decapitated the MLL-Front. The whole leadership of the Front – with the exception of Stan Poppe – was arrested: Henk Sneevliet, Willem Dolleman, Ab Menist, Jan Edel (1908–42), Cornelis Gerritsen (1905–42), Rein Witteveen (1893–1942), Gerrit Koeslag (1904–42) and Jan Schrieffer (1906–42) were all condemned to death for sabotage. Gerritsen committed suicide one day before the date of execution. Before being executed at Leusden near Amersfoort, on 13 April, they sang the hymn of the cause for which they had sacrificed their lives: the *Internationale*.<sup>81</sup>

Other members of the MLL-Front were shot by the Gestapo on 16 October: J.H.E. Roebers (1886–1942) and A. IJmker (1896–1942).

Despite the blow to the Front, the struggle against the war, the struggle for internationalism, continued. The *Communistenbond Spartacus* ('Spartacus Communist Union') took the reins from the MLL-Front. A new page was turned in the history of the council-communist movement.

80 See Bot 1983, pp. 81–4.

81 Sneevliet and his comrades were arrested after an ex-member of the OSP who had turned Nazi, denounced Gerritsen (a member of the central committee) to the Germans. Before a German tribunal Sneevliet made a political speech in which he attacked National Socialism and Stalinism, condemning nationalism and the Orangist resistance. Situating himself in the line of Marx, Lenin and Luxemburg, he rejected the accusation of 'sabotage' brought against him by the German military tribunal.

## The *Communistenbond Spartacus* and the Council-Communist Current (1942–68)

### 1 The Birth of the *Communistenbond* (1942–5)

The MLL-Front's evolution towards internationalist positions (against the defence of the USSR, struggle against both imperialist blocs, whether 'democratic', 'fascist', or 'communist') was atypical. Emerging from the RSAP, orientated towards left-socialism, the MLL-Front moved towards council-communist positions. This orientation is to be explained, above all, by Sneevliet's strength of personality. Despite his already advanced years, he was still able to develop politically, and he had nothing left to lose on the personal level.<sup>1</sup> Such a profound political transformation can only be compared with those – also atypical examples – of Munis's group, of the RKD, and of Aghis Stinas's group.<sup>2</sup>

However, this evolution had not been taken to its final conclusion. The deaths of Sneevliet and his comrades – in particular Ab Menist (1896–1942) – completely decapitated the Front's leadership. The Front's cohesion had been partly dependent on the political authority of Sneevliet, who was more a militant guided by his intuition and revolutionary conviction than a theoretician.

The death of Sneevliet, and of almost all the members of the central committee, paralysed the organisation for several months. From March until the

1 One of Sneevliet's sons (Pim) had committed suicide in 1932, the other (Pam) had been killed (or also committed suicide?) in Spain in 1937 fighting in the POUM militia.

2 Exiled in Mexico during the war, the Munis group took up internationalist positions against the defence of the USSR. See Agustín Guillamón's preface to Munis 1999, pp. 13–28.

The RKD, which had also sprung from Trotskyism and included both French and Austrian militants, at the end of the war collaborated within the French Fraction of the Communist Left. They moved gradually towards anarchism after 1946, with particularly close contact with *Le Libertaire* in France and anarchist groups in Darmstadt – the *Föderation freier Sozialisten Deutschlands* – and Hamburg (*Kulturföderation freier Sozialisten und Antimilitaristen*). They disappeared after 1949. For the RKD's history, see the political testimony of Georg Scheuer (pseudonyms: Armand, Gaston, Carl Langer, Charles Berry, Martin Bucher, and so on): 'Der andere Widerstand in Frankreich (1939–1945)', in *Archiv für die Geschichte des Widerstandes und der Arbeit* (AGWA), No. 14, Bochum, 1996.

For the dissident-Trotskyist group (Internationalist Communist Union) of Aghis Stinas (Spiros, 1900–87), in Greece, which influenced Castoriadis, see Peregalli 2002.

summer of 1942, all of its militants remained in hiding, and avoided any contact for fear of the Gestapo, which they suspected of having dismantled the Front thanks to an informer working within the organisation. However, the police-archives and those of Sneevliet's trial give no indication that such a Gestapo agent existed.<sup>3</sup>

Stan Poppe was the only survivor from among the Front's leadership. Under his influence, the *Revolutionair-Socialistische Arbeidersbeweging* ('Revolutionary-Socialist Workers' Movement') was founded during the course of the summer. Although the organisation was formally in continuity with the Front, the term 'workers' movement' suggested that it saw itself neither as a front, nor as a party.

Following the formation of Stan Poppe's group, Dolleman's remaining supporters founded their own group on 22 August 1942, in The Hague, with a Trotskyist orientation. Thus was born the *Comité van Revolutionnaire Marxisten* ('Committee of Revolutionary Marxists'), on the basis of defence of the USSR.<sup>4</sup> This group was much smaller than the Revolutionary-Socialist Workers' Movement. Every month it produced 2,000 copies of its paper *De Rode October* ('Red October'). Max Perthus, just freed from prison, was among its leaders. The old Trotskyist fraction of the MLL-Front was thus re-formed. Most of the youngest and more activist members of the old Front joined the CRM. Logically enough, the CRM declared itself the Dutch section of the Fourth International in June 1944.<sup>5</sup>

This final split was the result of the confrontation between two irreconcilable political positions: the defence of the internationalist positions adopted in July 1941 by Sneevliet and his comrades, as against support for Russia, and, consequently, for the war and the Allied military bloc.

Other reasons – both organisational and personal – may have played a role in the split. During the summer of 1942, Poppe was careful to eliminate all those in favour of the defence of the USSR from the new leadership. Moreover, Poppe

3 Max Perthus's and Wim Bot's studies of the MLL-Front, based on German archives in the Netherlands, give no basis for such a hypothesis.

4 Winkel 1954 claims that Barend Luteraan, ex-leader of the KAPN and a friend of Gorter, wrote for the CRM: it seems that during the war, Luteraan created his own group, on Trotskyist positions. After the war, he became a member of the Dutch Trotskyists (RCP), and then in 1953 joined the Social Democracy (PvdA). See Bos 1996.

5 The 'Bolshevik-Leninist group' (GBL), which had been formed on the positions of the Fourth International in 1938, disappeared following the arrest of its leaders. Although very weak numerically, the CRM declared itself the 'Revolutionary Communist Party' in December 1945, and published the periodical *De Tribune*.

had been the last person to see Sneevliet before his arrest, and was, therefore, considered by some as suspicious.<sup>6</sup>

In fact, the organisation formed around Stan Poppe was well-prepared for clandestinity. It was able to continue political work until the end of the Second World-War almost without arrests,<sup>7</sup> in part thanks to Molenaar's great skill in forging identity-documents and ration-books for the underground-militants, Trotskyists included.<sup>8</sup>

By the end of the summer, the group, with some fifty militants, began to publish a more or less regular roneoed bulletin: *Spartacus*. This was the organ of the *Communistenbond Spartacus*. Several pamphlets were published, revealing a higher theoretical level than in the MLL-Front. By the end of 1944, *Spartacus* had become a monthly theoretical organ. From October 1944 until May 1945, a weekly newsheet in the form of a leaflet accompanied it: *Spartacus – actuele berichten*.

Politically speaking, the *Bond's* members were older, and so more tempered and better trained theoretically than the Trotskyist elements. Many of them had been militants in the NAS, and had brought with them a definite revolutionary-sindicalist spirit. For example, Anton (Toon) van de Berg, a militant of the OSP and then of the RSAP, had led the NAS in Rotterdam up until 1940. The *Communistenbond's* Rotterdam group was formed around him, and was characterised until well after the war by an activist spirit. Other militants had a long political past, marked less by syndicalism than by left-socialism, which they had rejected within the MLL-Front. Such was the case of Stan Poppe.

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6 Suspicion fell on Stan Poppe after the war. Sneevliet had been arrested after visiting Poppe. In the files of the Sneevliet trial, it was claimed that he had been captured 'with Poppe's help'. In December 1950, a commission of enquiry was formed, composed of the RCP, the *Communistenbond*, and the small independent union, the OVB, of which the Trotskyists were members. It concluded unanimously that Poppe's behaviour was above reproach, and that no blame could be attached to him (Bot 1983, p. 185.) Born in Tilburg in 1899, Constant Johan Hendrik (Stan) Poppe joined the SDAP in 1918. In 1923 he became a Social-Democratic town-councillor in Ede, and remained so until 1931. In 1932 he joined the OSP, a left-socialist split from the SDAP. He was sacked from his job as a customs-officer for his political activities. In 1936, he was secretary of the RSAP. He left it 'officially' in 1938, in order to keep his position as a customs-officer, but in reality remained one of its leaders up until the war.

7 Bertus Nansink was one of the few militants to be arrested and sent to a concentration-camp. Leen Molenaar's (pseudonym: Kees; died in 1947) system of forged documents was extremely efficient: it was also put at the disposal of the Trotskyists of the CRM – 75 members in 1943, led by Herman Drenth (see Bot 1986, p. 27).

8 Of a population of 6 million, 300,000 people lived in hiding, with false papers and ration-books.



Stan Poppe (1899–1991) had played an important part in the OSP. He had worked as secretary within the party-leadership. During the merger with the RSP, he had become a member of the RSAP's political bureau. In 1936, he was made party-secretary and treasurer, and in December was a delegate, together with Ab Menist, to the Conference of the Centre for the Fourth International. A member of the leading bodies of the RSAP from 1938, he was in 1940 one of the leaders of the MLL-Front. In the Front, and later in the *Communistenbond Spartacus*, he was known under the pseudonym Tjeerd Woudstra. He was especially interested in economic studies, and his political orientation remained a mixture of Leninism and 'councilism'.

Most of the militants came from the old RSAP, without going through the Trotskyist movement (which was, in any case, very weak in the Netherlands). Many continued as militants in the *Bond* after the war, some to the end of their lives, like Bertus Nansink (1912–1995) and Wiebe van der Wal. Others, like Jaap van Otterloo (1913–2000), Jan Vastenhouw, and Cees van der Kuil, left in 1950.

Nonetheless, for another two years *Spartacus's* evolution was marked by political ambiguities that showed that the spirit of the NAS had not totally disappeared. Left-socialist reflexes reappeared during contacts with a social-democratic group that had left the RSAP at the beginning of the war, and whose strongest personality was Wijnand Romijn. At the end of 1943, the latter had written a pamphlet under the pseudonym Socius, calling for a 'tactical' support for the Allied war-effort. *Spartacus* attacked this position violently, and gave up the merger-negotiations with Romijn.<sup>9</sup> However, the very fact that the proposal to merge with this group could have been made showed that the *Bond* had no class-analysis of social democracy. *Spartacus* was a long way from the council-communists, who had always denounced the socialist groups, right or left, as counter-revolutionary and bourgeois. This persistent effort to make contact with left-socialists appeared again in November 1944, when it carried out joint

9 See *Spartacus*, 'Bulletin van de revolutionair-socialistische Arbeidersbeweging in Nederland', January 1944.

After the war, together with Jacques de Kadt and others, Wijnand Romijn edited the independent left-socialist periodical *De Baanbreker*, to which Gerard van 't Reve and Sal Tas gave some assistance. This last was, after 1948, more and more involved in an 'anti-communist' activity, getting in touch with the American unions and the Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF) founded in 1950 by the US government. See *BWSA* 1998, pp. 219–23. In 1946, inside the PvdA, Wijnand Romijn, together with the editorial team of the periodical *De Vlam* – Piet Meertens (1899–1985), Tom Rot (1909–82), Sam de Wolf, Henriëtte Roland Holst – created the *Sociaal-Democratische Centrum*, which had 150 members.

work with the *De Vonk* group (see Chapter Ten), which ultimately collapsed because of political disagreements.

Although the break with Trotskyism was complete organisationally, the same was not true ideologically, as far as the left-tendencies were concerned. During 1944, Poppe had two meetings with Vereeken's group *Tegen de Stroom* ('Against the Current'). Although the latter rejected the defence of the USSR in June 1941, it maintained its links with Raymond and Henri Molinier's French *Comité Communiste Internationaliste* (CCI); after the war, it joined the Fourth International.<sup>10</sup> Still more significant was the fact that, even within the *Bond*, the last hesitations on the defence of the USSR never entirely disappeared. A small part of the organisation – which rejected the defence of the Russian camp in the ongoing war – was in favour of such a defence in the case of a third world-war between the Western Allies and the USSR.<sup>11</sup>

For two years – until the theoretical contribution of the ex-GIC gained the upper hand – the *Bond* tried to clarify its political positions; its activity consisted largely of theoretical work in the form of pamphlets, and depended largely on the efforts of Bertus Nansink and, above all, Stan Poppe.

This theoretical work is explained partly by the conditions of the period – the defeat of 1941's February Strike, deportations of workers, the Nazi extermination of the Jewish proletarians in its camps – which was far from favouring any 'revolutionary uprising'. The Dutch workers were caught between the hammer and the anvil: repression by the Nazis and their collaborators, and nationalist resistance-movements which tried to divert the workers' strikes which broke out in 1943. The Dutch working class was drained of its substance by deportations and mounting repression.

In February 1943 the Dutch authorities rounded up workers to force them to work in Germany. On 11 March 1943, a decree was published ordering students to sign a declaration of 'loyalty' and their willingness to work in Germany once they had finished their studies. On 24 March 1943, the Dutch doctors resigned from their positions so as to protest against the German pressures on their profession.

In February Himmler decided to re-intern 300,000 soldiers of the old army, which had been demobilised in June 1940. He published a decree to this effect on 29 April 1943. In response, wildcat-strikes broke out, spreading across the whole country, except for among railworkers. On 1 May, a state of emergency

<sup>10</sup> See Vereeken 1976, Chapter One.

<sup>11</sup> See 'De Sovjet-Unie en wij' ('The Soviet-Union and us'), *Spartacus*, October 1942, and February 1944.

was proclaimed and there were bloody reprisals by the Gestapo: shootings in the streets, executions of workers, and even arrests of factory-directors to hold them responsible for the disruption of work. In Maastricht and in the South (Limburg), the Catholic clergy encouraged the strikers' movement, in collaboration with illegal Orangist groups. The labour-movement remained prisoner of its insertion in a wide cross-class front of resistance to the savage demands of the occupying power, which had a robust repressive apparatus.

By 7 May 1943, more than eighty death-sentences had been carried out, and 60 people were killed by random shootings in the streets. The same day, the occupation-authorities published a decree obliging all men from 18 to 35 years old to register with the 'labour-exchange' offices.

The last important strikes came in 1944, but these were under the control of Dutch Resistance and the Orangist government in London. On 17 September 1944, railworkers stopped work on instructions of the Dutch government in London.<sup>12</sup>

The action of the members of *Spartacusbond* during this time was mostly theoretical, for lack of opportunities to engage in a class-struggle against the war. This is why the texts of the *Bond* concentrated on the historic period that world-capitalism was going through.

Stan Poppe's pamphlet on *The perspectives of imperialism after the war in Europe and the task of revolutionary socialists*<sup>13</sup> was written in December 1943 and published in January 1944. The text was strongly influenced by Lenin's *Imperialism, highest stage of capitalism*, and claimed to represent the 'scientific socialism of Marx, Engels and Lenin', not of Rosa Luxemburg. It tried to define the course of capitalism and the revolutionary perspectives for the proletariat.

The cause of the world-war was 'the general crisis of capitalism' since 1914. Poppe followed Lenin in defining the new period of crisis as imperialist and monopolist: 'Lenin defined this final and highest stage as imperialist. Imperialism is the political side of a society that produces under a capitalist-monopolist mode'.

This reference to Lenin is particularly interesting when we think that the 'councilists' of *Spartacus* were to define themselves as anti-Leninist.

<sup>12</sup> Rüter 1960 (with an English summary).

<sup>13</sup> *De perspectieven van het imperialisme na de oorlog in Europa en de taak van de revolutionair-socialisten*. It is remarkable that this pamphlet, the ideas of which are far removed from council-communism, should be cited as the *Bond's* political basis in 1945, without any criticism of its content. See 'Beschouwingen over de situatie: de balans', in *Spartacus*, May 1945.

However, we can already see a certain theoretical reflection appearing under the textbook-reference to Lenin. Poppe understood the crisis as one of overproduction. This is expressed in state-capitalism, which is the conclusion to the monopolist phase, and whose expression is the war economy. The latter invades the productive process, and 'the [capitalist] system can only be saved by war and by war-production'. However, Poppe's reasoning stopped there. At no time did he speak of Russia as being state-capitalist. On the contrary, he claimed that the USSR was 'not subject to the grip of capitalist monopoly-production and the domination of the market'; that it was 'the only state-organised adversary of imperialism'. This position is all the more surprising in that Poppe was one of those within the MLL-Front who described the USSR as state-capitalist. The text's denunciation of state-capitalist measures in every country 'whether democratic, autocratic, republican or monarchist', except the USSR, was thus contradictory.

The analysis of the European conflict was clearer: 'The war is coming to an end. The military defeat of Germany and her allies is not speculation, but a fact.' In a stylistic paradox, Poppe believed that the Second World-War would be prolonged into a third world-war in Asia for the domination of the colonies, between Japan and the Anglo-American camp.

Rather like Bordiga after 1945, Poppe believed that the war would lead to the fascistisation of the Western democracies on the political level: 'In foreign politics, imperialist war is the other side of the monopoly-exploitation of labour-power, while in domestic policy, bourgeois democracy, the form of life of the same social order, is like fascism'.<sup>14</sup>

In the event of a revolutionary crisis, the democracies would find in fascism 'their own future', or else a form of neo-fascism would be imposed on the economy: 'fascism will no longer exist in words, but in reality; we will live through its second golden age. At the heart of the neo-fascist social policy will be the degradation of working-class incomes, as a necessary consequence of the policy of deflation'.

Poppe's belief that open capitalist crisis would continue after the war was based on the example of the 1930s; there would be no 'perspective of reconstruction, unless it is a very short and extremely modest one'.

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14 'Le prospettive del dopoguerra in relazione alla piattaforma del partito' ('Perspectives for the postwar period in relation to the party's platform'), *Prometeo*, No. 3, Milan, October 1946. In this article, Bordiga claimed that 'the Western democracies are evolving progressively towards totalitarian and fascist forms'. Like the Dutch left, Bordiga intended these words to emphasise the tendency towards state-capitalism in the countries of Western Europe.

The alternatives for the proletariat were socialism and the 'plunge into barbarism'; in other words, between proletarian revolution or war. But while making this observation, the text avoided any predictions. He insisted that a war 'for the reconquest and preservation of Indonesia and the Far East' would involve 'the inevitable perspective of a war against the Soviet Union itself' either during the 'third' war in the East, or during a 'fourth' world-war.

Nonetheless, he wrote that 'the general crisis of capitalism is ripening the revolutionary crisis of the system'. This did not imply the 'automatic upsurge of the revolution': the latter 'depends on the conscious intervention of the revolutionary class during the [revolutionary] process'.

Theoretically, Poppe defined the revolution as the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat, and the dissolution 'of this dictatorship and of the state itself'. The dictatorship would be that of the factory-councils, which would form 'the central councils of authority'. It is interesting to note that peasants' councils are excluded here. In the 'struggle for power', which is nothing other than 'the struggle for and with the councils', the factory-proletariat is the heart of the revolution. Poppe's vision was very 'factoryist', indeed 'Gramscian', and he gave factory-occupations, along the lines of Italy in the 1920s, as an example of the revolutionary struggle for power.<sup>15</sup>

It was symptomatic that he made a separation between the revolution of the councils in the industrialised countries, and the call for support for 'national-liberation struggles': 'There can be no socialist policy in Europe and America without the proclamation of complete independence for the colonised peoples'.

On the colonial question, Poppe took up Lenin's position on the 'right of peoples to self-determination'. Poppe's positions do not seem to have reflected those of all the militants: in 1940, Jan Vastenhouw – then a member of the MLL-Front – firmly attacked Lenin's conceptions in an internal bulletin.

However, Poppe went a long way in his analysis; not only did he consider that 'the task [of revolutionary socialists] is naturally to call the workers of all

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15 In its theoretical periodical *Maandblad Spartacus* (Nos. 9 and 12, 1945), the *Bond* published a study on the factory-occupations in Italy: 'Een bedrijfsbezetting' ('A factory-occupation'). The article declared that in 1920, 'the factories formed a unity attached neither to a party nor to a trade-union. The movement ended with a compromise between unions and bosses.' It showed that factory-occupations are not enough, and that workers' councils must appear, whose 'first task is not the organisation of industry, but the organisation of the struggle. The period is then one of war: civil war'. This critical vision of the Italian factory-occupations is very different from the factoryist vision of 'production-management' by the councils later defended by the *Bond*.

countries to chase the Japanese out of the territories they occupy in China, and Indonesia since 1942', he also proclaimed the need for this 'liberation' to be carried out under the banner of the USSR. Poppe meant, not the USSR of Stalin, but a USSR freed from Stalinism by the workers and peasants thanks to the seizure of power by the councils in Europe. From this viewpoint – a mixture of fantasy and faith – there would be a revolutionary war of 'national liberation':

If the socialists are not wrong in their forecasts, then this means that the Soviet Union will become the most important factor in the struggle against Japanese imperialism. A Soviet Union able to rely on an alliance with the power of the councils of other peoples instead of dubious treaties with capitalist governments; a Soviet Union that knows its rear to be protected by a European union of councils and the solidarity of a proletariat guided by revolutionary socialism should also be able – without the help of British or American armies – to chase the Japanese imperialists out of Manchukuo [Manchuria, 1932–45, under Japanese rule] and from other territories of the Chinese Republic, as well as from Indonesia.

This idea of a 'revolutionary war of liberation' was similar to the theory of revolutionary war as advanced in 1920 by the Comintern. However, we cannot help remarking, here, that the 'liberation' at bayonet-point advocated by Poppe was more national than it was revolutionary, since it proposed to restore in its entirety the territorial integrity of the 'Chinese Republic'. It appears as a bourgeois national war, like the wars of the French Revolution, erecting a national framework, rather than destroying it. Poppe's theory of the workers' councils was a national theory of councils federated in unions. Here, the conception of the 'national-liberation struggle' was the corollary of a national conception of the workers' revolution which would produce the workers' councils.

The positions of Poppe and the *Communistenbond* were thus still far removed from those of council-communism. They were still a syncretic mixture of Leninism, Trotskyism, even Gramscianism. This was all the more true in that the *Bond* remained incapable of adopting a theoretical position on the nature of the USSR until the summer of 1944.

In the end, it was through discussions conducted during the summer of 1944 with old members of the GIC that the *Communistenbond Spartacus* moved definitely towards council-communism.<sup>16</sup> A few members of the *Bond* made

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16 On the history of the merge between the ex-GIC and the *Communistenbond*, some useful details are to be found in a letter written by Henk Canne Meijer to the RKD-CR paper

contact with Henk Canne Meijer, Ben Sijes, Jan Appel, Theo Maassen, and Bruun van Albada, to ask them to work in their organisation. They agreed to contribute theoretically through writing and discussions, but they wanted neither to dissolve their own group, nor join the *Bond* straight away. They were still very suspicious of the new organisation, marked by its 'Leninist' tradition; they wanted to wait to see how far the *Bond* would move towards council-communism. Little-by-little, they took more part in editorial tasks and intervention, with the hybrid-status of 'guests'.<sup>17</sup> They avoided taking position on the *Bond's* organisational issues, and took no part in meetings where these issues were raised. At the beginning of 1945, they became full members of the organisation, once theoretical and political agreement had been reached. Theo Maassen and Bruun van Albada were members of the *Bond's* political commission.

One fruit of the *Bond's* political evolution was the publication, in August 1944, of the pamphlet *De Strijd om de macht* ('The struggle for power'). The pamphlet declared its opposition to any kind of parliamentary or trade-union activity and called for the formation of new, anti-union, proletarian organs, born from the spontaneous struggle: factory-councils, which were to form the basis for the workers' councils. The pamphlet observed that changes in the capitalist mode of production were bringing about structural modifications within the working class, and so put on the agenda new forms of workers' organisations corresponding to the emergence of a 'new workers' movement'.<sup>18</sup>

In this pamphlet, the *Bond* – unlike the old GIC – called for the formation of a revolutionary party and an International. However, unlike the Trotskyists, it insisted that such a party could only emerge at the end of the war, and once the proletariat's organs of struggle were formed.

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*Le Prolétaire* (30 June 1946). In 1944, Canne Meijer wrote a discussion-text on workers' democracy: 'Arbeiders democratie in de bedrijven', *Spartacus* No. 1 (January 1945). Bruun van Albada published a study on Marxist method as a dialectical and scientific method of investigation: 'Het marxisme als methode van onderzoek'.

17 As Canne Meijer notes in the same letter: '... they were only 'guests', doing all the work ... in common with the comrades of the *Bond*, but they avoided any organisational interference'.

18 In 1945 and 1946 *Bond* members took part with the CRM in the formation of the *Eenheids-vakbeweging* (EVB), at the outset a movement of 'rank-and-file' workers. The *Eenheids-vakcentrale* (Unitary trade-union central), an official trade-union, was in the hands of the CPN. For a history of this last union, see Coomans, De Jonge and Nijhof 1976.

## 2 The *Bond* from 1945 to 1947

### 2.1 *The Composition, Organisation, and Activities of the Spartacus Group*

When, in May 1945, the *Communistenbond Spartacus* published – legally – its monthly journal *Spartacus*, it could no longer be considered as a continuation of the MLL-Front. Thanks to the militant-contribution of the members of the GIC, it had become a council-communist organisation. As Canne Meijer noted in 1946:

The present *Spartacusbond* cannot be considered as a direct continuation of the RSAP. Its composition is different, and on many questions its positions are different also ... Many who once belonged to the RSAP have not joined *Spartacus*, although some have been attracted to the Trotskyists. But there are not many of them, since the Trotskyists themselves are not very numerous anyway.<sup>19</sup>

*Spartacus* was the biggest internationalist organisation in the Netherlands, and bore a heavy political responsibility at the international level, for the regroupment of revolutionaries in Europe, in search of international links after the divisions enforced by the occupation. This possibility of becoming a pole of regroupment depended both on the organisation's solidity – its political and theoretical homogeneity – as well as a clear will to break out of the linguistic frontiers of 'little Holland'. Numerically, the *Bond* was quite strong for a revolutionary organisation, especially in a small country. In 1945, it had some one hundred militants; it possessed both a monthly theoretical review, and a daily paper with a print-run of 6,000.<sup>20</sup> It had a presence in most of the main towns, in particular in the working-class districts of Amsterdam and Rotterdam, which had a real council-communist tradition.

However, the organisation was far from united. It brought together onetime members of the MLL-Front and the GIC, but also syndicalists from the pre-war NAS. The *Bond* had also been joined by anarchists from the old 'Libertarian-Socialist Movement'. Many young militants had joined *Spartacus*, but they had no political experience or theoretical training. There was thus a union

19 From the letter already quoted of 30 June 1946. Canne Meijer considered that the *Bond* was part of a new workers' movement, not in opposition to the old one – whether on the left or the ultra-left – but a movement with different foundations.

20 Letter written by Canne Meijer (27 June 1946) to the French 'ultra-left' paper *Le Prolétaire*. By 1946, *Spartacus*'s print-run had been reduced to 4,000 copies.



of elements from different origins, but the precondition for the creation of an organisationally homogeneous structure was lacking. As we shall see later, there were strong centrifugal tendencies. The libertarian elements brought anti-organisational ideas with them, while the ex-syndicalists – especially active around Toon van de Berg in Rotterdam – were very activist and workerist. The latter's conception was more syndicalist than political. Moreover, the young militants, because of their political immaturity, were inclined to follow one or other of the two tendencies, especially the former. Organisationally, the *Bond* had nothing in common with the old GIC, which saw itself as a federation of working-groups. The *Bond* was a centralised organisation, and remained one until 1947. Its organisation was made up of nuclei (*Kernen*), or local sections, of six members, grouped in territorial or urban sections. The five-member executive committee represented the organisation towards the outside, and was responsible to the *Bond's* congress, the organisation's supreme authority. As in any revolutionary organisation worthy of the name, the *Bond* had elected working-bodies: a political commission including the editorial board and which was responsible for political questions; an organisation-commission for ongoing work; a control-commission to verify that the decisions taken were carried out; and a financial control-commission. In 1945, there were altogether between 21 and 27 people in these central organs.

Membership of the organisation was clearly defined in the statutes drawn up in October 1945.<sup>21</sup> At the time, the *Bond* had a very lofty notion of organisation, and was extremely cautious in accepting new members, demanding of them 'the discipline of a democratic-centralist party'.<sup>22</sup> In effect, the *Bond* was renewing the tradition of the KAPD.

However, the *Bond* also drew some less desirable aspects from this tradition. While its commissions were centralised, it was decentralised at the local level. It considered that each 'nucleus is autonomous in its own region'.<sup>23</sup>

21 The Statutes were published in the *Bond's* internal bulletin: *Uit eigen kring* ('In our circle'), No. 5, October 1945.

22 Decision of the conference of 21–22 July 1945, attended by 21 militants of the *Kernen* of Leiden, Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and Hilversum-Bussum. See *Uit eigen kring* (*UEK*), No. 2, August 1945.

23 'The nucleus is autonomous in its own circle. It decides on on the admission or exclusion of its members. The Central Executive Committee is consulted in advance on the admission and exclusion of members.' The nucleus's autonomy was thus limited in theory, especially since organisational discipline was demanded: 'The nuclei are required to observe the decisions taken by the conference of the *Bond*, and spread the principles of the *Bond*, as these are and will be established by the conferences of the *Bond*'.

The aim of a 'decentralisation of work' inevitably contradicted the centralism of the organisation.

Moreover, the *Bond* carried with it certain conceptions of organisation that had blossomed in the mass-political organisations of the past. The organisation was still conceived as an organisation of 'cadres', hence the establishment, decided at the conference of 21–22 July 1945, of a 'school for Marxist cadres'. It was not wholly unitary. The 'Association of the Friends of Spartacus' (vsv) existed in its periphery. The vsv was, in effect, an organisation of young sympathisers, with members between 20 and 25 years of age. Although they had no duties towards the *Bond*, they were supposed to take part in its propaganda-work and contribute financially. Such a vague distinction between militants and sympathisers added considerably to the centrifugal tendencies within the organisation.

Another example of the weight of the past can be found in the creation, in August 1945, of a 'workers' aid'-organisation (*Arbeidershulp*). The aim was to create within the workplace a body, or rather an emergency-fund, to give financial help to workers on strike. Running through this was the idea that the *Communistenbond* should lead the workers' struggle, and substitute itself for their spontaneous efforts at organisation. But the 'workers' aid' only had a short life. The discussion on the party, throughout the *Bond*, allowed it to clarify the nature and function of the political organisation of revolutionaries.

In fact, *Spartacus* thought that the workers' struggles that broke out at the end of the war heralded a revolutionary period, if not in the short term then at least in the future. In April 1945, the conference of the *Spartacusbond* proclaimed the necessity of the party, and the temporary nature of its own existence as a national organisation: 'The *Bond* is a temporary organisation of Marxists, orientated towards the formation of a true international communist party, which must emerge from the struggle of the working class.'<sup>24</sup>

It is noteworthy that this declaration posed the question of the birth of a party in the revolutionary period. Such a conception was the opposite of that of the Trotskyists during the 1930s, then of the post-1945 Bordigists, who considered that the party was the product of mere will, and so saw the moment of its emergence as a secondary question. It need only be 'proclaimed' to exist. No less remarkable was the 'Inaugural Address' – adopted by the July conference – addressed to internationalist revolutionary groups. It excluded the Dutch Trotskyist CRM, with which the conference broke off all contact,

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24 *UEK*, No. 1, April 1945.

because of their position of 'support for the USSR'.<sup>25</sup> Finally, it was a call for the regroupment of the different groups of the communist left, which rejected the vision of a seizure of power by a party: 'It is in and by the movement itself that a new Comintern can be born, in which the communists of all countries – relieved of bureaucratic domination, but also of any pretension to seize power on their own account – can take part'.<sup>26</sup>

However, it should be noted that this call for the regroupment of internationalist revolutionaries only gave rise to limited practical measures. The conference decided to set up an information-secretariat in Brussels, whose job would be to make contact with various groups, and publish a *Bulletin d'information*. At the same time, contact was briefly renewed with Vereeken's group. It was clear that the positions of his group 'Against the Current' (*Tegen de stroom*) were incompatible with those of the *Bond*.<sup>27</sup> But the very fact that the contact was made indicated an absence of political criteria in delimiting the internationalist communist groups from other confused groups. The same absence of criteria appeared in 1947, during an international conference held in Brussels (see below).

## 2.2 *The Congress of December 1945 – The Theses on the Party*

The pact that the *Bond* was preparing for the emergence of a party demanded the greatest possible homogeneity within the organisation on the theoretical conception of the party. This is why the *Theses on the tasks and nature of the Party* were written and discussed at the congress of 24–26 December 1945.<sup>28</sup> They were adopted by the congress and published in pamphlet-form in January 1946.<sup>29</sup> It is very significant that they were drawn up by an old member of the GIC: Bruun van Albada. This very fact demonstrates the *Bond's* unanimity on

25 *UEK*, No. 2, August 1945: 'The conference decides to reject any collaboration within the CRM. The decision is taken not to enter into a discussion within the CRM.'

26 *UEK*, No. 4, August 1945, draft-inaugural address 'to the manual and intellectual workers of all countries'.

27 The proposal to establish an 'information-secretariat' in Brussels came from Vereeken's group 'Against the Current' and the leadership of the *Communistenbond*; the conference gave its agreement. See *Uit eigen kring*, No. 2, August 1945, Point 8 of the resolution adopted.

28 The *Theses*, one of three draft-versions, were published in *UEK*, No. 8, December 1945, and in pamphlet-form in January 1946. The two other drafts were submitted for discussion before being rejected.

29 The *Theses* were not called into question until 1951. Proposals for amendments were submitted to the organisation by the Amsterdam group. See *UEK*, 20 October 1951.

the question, and, above all, expressed the explicit rejection of the conceptions which had held sway in the GIC during the 1930s. The organisation showed how important it considered the *Theses* by holding public meetings on the subject of the party throughout 1946.

The *Theses* are focused on the change in the party's function between the period of capitalism's ascendancy – called the period of 'liberal capitalism' – and the period of decadence following the First World-War – the period of the domination of state-capitalism. Although the notions of ascendancy and decadence are not used, the text forcefully emphasises the change in historical period, which implies a calling into question of the old conceptions of the party: 'The present critique of the old parties is not only a critique of their practical policies, or of the behaviour of their leaders, but a critique of the whole old conception of the party. It is a direct consequence of the changes in the structure and objectives of the mass-movement: the task of the [revolutionary] party lies in its activity within the mass-movement of the proletariat.'

The *Theses* showed historically that the conception of a workers' party acting on the model of the bourgeois parties of the French Revolution, and not distinct from other social strata, had become outdated with the Paris Commune. The party aims not at the conquest of the state, but at its destruction:

In this period of the development of mass-action, the political party of the working class was to play a much greater role. Because the workers had not yet become the overwhelming majority of the population, the political party still appeared to be the necessary organisation, and it had to work to draw the majority of the population in behind the action of the workers, just as the bourgeoisie's party had acted in the bourgeois revolution; because the proletarian party had to be at the head of the state, the proletariat had to conquer state-power.

Demonstrating capitalism's evolution after 1900, 'a period of growing prosperity for capitalism', the *Theses* showed the development of reformism within the Social Democracy. They tend to reject the parties of the Second International after 1900, given their evolution towards parliamentary and trade-unionist opportunism. Moreover, they ignore the reaction of the communist lefts (Lenin, Luxemburg, Pannekoek) within it. Exposing the 'pretence of full democracy' within the classical Social Democracy, and the 'complete split between the mass of members and the party-leadership', the *Theses* draw negative conclusions, and do not show the organisation's positive contribution to the workers' movement of the day:

The political party ceases to be an embodiment of the power of the working class. It becomes the workers' diplomatic representative within capitalist society. It takes part in Parliament, and in the organisation of capitalist society, as a loyal opposition.

The First World-War opened up a new period: that of the proletarian revolution. The *Theses* argued that the origin of the revolution lay in the absolute pauperisation of the proletariat, not in the change in period. Consequently, it was difficult to see how the revolutionary period of 1917–23 differed from 1848, a period of 'absolute pauperisation' characteristic of youthful capitalism:

The outbreak of the World-War meant that the period of relative pauperisation was being succeeded by that of absolute pauperisation. This new development must necessarily push the workers into a revolutionary opposition to capital. At the same time, the workers also entered into conflict with the Social Democracy.

The *Theses* did not omit to emphasise the positive contributions of the post-war revolutionary wave: the spontaneous birth of 'enterprise-organisations and workers' councils as organs of workers' democracy within the enterprise, and organs of local political democracy'. However, the *Theses* minimised the revolutionary significance of Russia in 1917; they only seemed to remember what followed it: the counter-revolution and state-capitalism. They saw in the October Revolution the origins of the Stalinist counter-revolution. Any process of 'degeneration' was denied, and the Russian workers thus made responsible for the defeat of the Russian Revolution. The development of 'state-socialism' (namely, state-capitalism) was seen as 'the result of the workers' and peasants' revolutionary struggle'.

Nonetheless, the *Theses* were lucid on the pernicious effect on the workers of the time, of the confusion between socialism and state-capitalism: '... thanks to the Russian Revolution, the state-socialist conception acquired a revolutionary halo, which contributed largely to blocking the workers' real revolutionary coming-to-consciousness'.<sup>30</sup>

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30 In 1943, Pannekoek himself, despite his analysis of the Russian Revolution as 'bourgeois', showed that October 1917 had had a positive effect on class-consciousness:

'Then, as a bright star in the dark sky the Russian-Revolution flared up and shone over the Earth. And everywhere, the masses were filled with anticipation and became restive, listening to its call for the finishing of the war, for brotherhood of the workers of all countries, for world-revolution against capitalism. Still clinging to their old socialist

The implicit rejection of the Russian Revolution and the contribution of the Bolshevik party in 1917 led the author of the *Theses* to identify the Bolshevism of 1917 with Stalinism. The only difference between Bolshevism and social democracy in setting up a 'state-planned economy', 'is one of method'.

The definition of the role of the party and of revolutionary intervention was more original. Adopting the KAPD's conception of the 1920s, the *Bond* emphasised that the party's role was neither to guide, educate, nor to substitute itself for the working class: 'The role of the party is now limited to an organisation of clarification and propaganda. Nor does it aspire to establish a domination over the class'.

The genesis of the party was closely dependent on the changes within capitalism – where 'the period of liberal capitalism is definitively closed' – and on the transformation of the workers' class-consciousness. The revolutionary struggle – which produced the party – was, above all, a struggle against the state produced by the action of the masses, and a conscious struggle for the organisation:

The state has clearly become the mortal enemy of the working class ... In every case, the workers' struggle is irreconcilably opposed to this state, not only to the governments but to the entire [state-]apparatus, including the old parties and unions ... There is an indissoluble link between the three elements of the struggle for the workers' emancipation: the upsurge of mass-action, of organisation, and of consciousness.<sup>31</sup>

The *Theses* established a dialectical interaction between the development of the revolutionary organisation and the revolutionary struggle: 'Thus the organisation develops within the struggle, materially and spiritually; and with the organisation, the struggle also develops'.

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doctrines and organisations the masses, uncertain under the flood of calumnies in the press, stood waiting, hesitating, whether the tale might still come true. Smaller groups, especially among the young workers, everywhere assembled in a growing communist movement. They were the advance guard in the movements that after the end of the war broke out in all countries, most strongly in defeated and exhausted Central Europe' (From Pannekoek 1974a, p. 184).

- 31 See Bordiga, in *Partito e Classe*, 1921 (reprinted in *Le Fil du Temps*, No. 8, 'Parti et Classe', Brussels, October 1971): 'A party lives when there is a living doctrine and method of action. A party is a school of political thought, and consequently an organisation of struggle. First, there is an act of consciousness: then an act of will, or more exactly a tendency towards a finality'.

The most significant aspect of the *Theses* was that they demonstrated the 'positive role of the revolutionary party' in the mass-movement, and that they defined the kind of revolutionary militant that should correspond to the 'new period'.

### 3 The Necessity of the Party: Coming to Consciousness

The *Theses* showed that the party was necessary, for it is a dialectical product of the development of class-consciousness, and, consequently, an active factor in this process of development. Here, we were far from the later councilist vision, whereby 'unorganised revolutionaries' dissolve themselves into the 'class-movement'. The Leninist vision, where the party is a general staff of the revolution, to which the workers are blindly subordinate, was also rejected. The necessity of the party also flowed not from the balance of forces between the organisation and the class, but from an 'organic relation' between party and class, born of the development of class-consciousness:

In the process of achieving consciousness through struggle, where the struggle becomes conscious of itself, the party has an important and necessary role to play. In the first place, it supports this achievement of consciousness. The lessons that must be drawn, as much from victory as from defeat, and of which the workers, taken individually, are more or less aware, are formulated by the party and spread among the masses by means of its propaganda. This is the idea, which, once it seizes hold of the masses, becomes a material force.

The party is neither a general staff detached from the class, nor the workers' 'thinking brain'; it is the focal point for the expression of the workers' growing consciousness.

While the class and party are in a complementary, organic relationship within a single unity of consciousness, they are, nonetheless, not identical. The party was the highest expression of the proletariat's class-consciousness, seen as a political and historic consciousness, and not as a reflection of the immediate struggle (immediate consciousness in the class). The party was thus 'a part of the class': 'The party is a part of the class, the most conscious in struggle and the most highly trained. It has the ability to understand first the dangers threatening [the workers' struggle], and to be the first to see the potential of the new organisations of power: it must struggle there for its opinion to be used to the utmost by the workers; it must spread its opinion by word, and if necessary

by active intervention, so that its example makes the working class advance in the struggle.'

It is notable that this conception of a propagandist party 'by word and deed' was identical to that of the KAPD in the 1920s. Here, the *Bond* had an almost voluntarist conception of the party, where the party's example in action is struggle, or even an incitement to struggle. This definition of party was also similar to that of Bordiga, for whom the party was a programme, plus a will to act.<sup>32</sup> But for the Dutch left, the programme was less an ensemble of theoretical and political principles, than the formulation of class-consciousness, or even a sum of workers' consciousness: 'The party must synthesise, in clear formulas, what each worker feels: that the situation is untenable, and that it is absolutely necessary to destroy capitalism'.

### 3.1 *The Party's Tasks: Theory and Praxis*

The *Theses* declared: 'Questions must be examined in their totality; the results must be set out with scientific clarity and precision'.

The party's tasks among the proletariat followed from this method:

- a task of 'clarification', not of organisation, the latter being the task of the workers in their struggle. The function of organising the class disappears, to be replaced by a task of clarification within the struggle. This clarification was defined negatively, as an ideological and practical struggle against 'all the underhand attempts by the bourgeoisie and its accomplices to contaminate the workers' organisations with their own influence';
- a task of 'practical intervention in the class-struggle'. This follows from the party's understanding that it cannot take from the workers their own functions: '[The party] can only intervene as a part of the class, and not in contradiction with it. Its position in intervening is solely to contribute to the deepening and extension of the domination of the power of the council-democracy ...'.

This function of the party did not imply passivity. The *Spartacusbond* affirmed its role as a 'motor' of the class-struggle, able to take initiatives which would compensate the 'workers' hesitations':

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32 See 'Het marxisme als methode van onderzoek'; an article written by Bruun van Albada, who was an astronomer, in: *Spartacus*, No. 1.



... when the workers hesitate to take certain measures, party members can, as revolutionary industrial workers, take the initiative, and they are even required to do so when it is both necessary and possible to carry out these methods. When the workers want to leave a decision to engage in action to a union-body, then conscious communists must take the initiative for an action of the workers themselves. In a more developed phase of the struggle, when the enterprise-organisations or the workers' councils hesitate when faced with a problem of economic organisation, then conscious communists must not only show the necessity of this organisation; they must also study these questions themselves, and call mass-meetings to discuss them. Thus, their activity unfolds within the struggle, and as a motor of the struggle, when it stagnates or is in danger of running into dead ends.

In this quote, we cannot help noticing a 'workerist' interpretation of intervention in the workers' councils. The fact that party-members intervened as 'industrial workers' seemed to exclude the possibility of 'conscious communists' – from the intelligentsia – defending their viewpoint before the workers, as party-members. On this basis, Lenin, Marx, or Engels would have been excluded. We know that in 1918, Rosa Luxemburg was denied the 'right' to speak in the Berlin Council, on the pretext that she was an 'intellectual'. The supporters of the motion of exclusion were members of the SPD, fully aware of Luxemburg's political weight. Here, the *Theses* seem to consider the 'intellectual' party-members as 'foreign' to the proletariat, despite the party being defined as 'a part of the class'.

Moreover, it is characteristic that the party's intervention in the councils should be focused, right from the start, on the economic problems of the period of transition: the management of production, and 'the organisation of the economy by the democracy of the workers' councils, whose basis is the calculation of labour-time'. When it declared that 'the necessity of the organisation of a planned communist economy must be clearly demonstrated', the *Spartacusbond* revealed a tendency to underestimate the political problems that are posed beforehand, in the proletarian revolution: the seizure of power by the councils, as a precondition for the 'period of transition towards communism'.

### 3.2 *The Party's Functioning*

The *Theses* remained silent on the question of the party's centralisation. They deal neither with the question of fractions and tendencies, nor with the question of internal democracy. The *Bond* revealed a tendency to idealise the party's

homogeneity. Like the postwar Bordigist PCInt, it did not envisage divergences appearing within the organisation.<sup>33</sup> But whereas the Bordigist party sought its 'guarantee' against divergence in an ideal and immutable programme, the *Spartacusbond* thought it could be found in the existence of ideal militants. According to the *Bond*, the militant is always capable of autonomous understanding and judgement: '[party-members] must be autonomous workers, with their own powers of judgement and comprehension'.

This definition of the militant looks like a 'categorical imperative', and an individual ethic within the party. It should be emphasised that the *Bond* thought that its proletarian membership and the high quality of each militant shielded the party from the risks of bureaucratic degeneration. And yet, was a purely working-class membership really a guarantee? The CPS' 'working-class' make-up during the 1920s and 1930s did not save them from Stalinist bureaucratisation, and the parties' organisation in factory-cells stifled even the best militants' political capacity for 'understanding and judgement'.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, in a revolutionary party there is no formal equality of ability. Real equality is political, because the party is, above all, a political body, whose cohesion is reflected in each of its members.

More deep-seated was the *Bond's* rejection of the Jesuitical 'corpse-like discipline' – the 'famous' *perinde ac cadaver* of the Society of Jesus – which breaks the deepest convictions of each militant: 'Tied to the party's general conceptions and principles, which are, at the same time, their own conceptions, [the militants] must apply and defend these in all circumstances. They do not suffer the dead discipline of unthinking submission to decisions; they know only of obedience on the basis of personal conviction, drawn from their fundamental conceptions; and in the case of a conflict within the organisation, it is this conviction that settles the matter.'

Thus they accepted a freely-agreed discipline, flowing from the defence of the party's principles. It is this notion of discipline that the *Bond* rejected (see below) a few years later, on the grounds that it was opposed to the free activity of each individual as 'a free man thinking for himself'.

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33 See Bordiga, in *L'Unità*, No. 172, 26 July 1925: '... the leaders from a working-class background have shown themselves at least as capable as the intellectuals of opportunism and betrayal, and, in general, more susceptible to absorption by bourgeois influences ... We declare that the worker, in his factory-cell, will tend to discuss only those particular questions that concern the workers in his enterprise'.

34 A second proposed draft of the *Theses* on the party raised the question. It explicitly rejected the conception of the party seizing and exercising power. See 'Stellingen, taak en wezen van de Partij, Thesis 9', *UEK*, No. 7, December 1945.

One very important idea is set out in the *Theses*. The party is not only a programme; it is made up of men animated by revolutionary passion. It is this passion, which the *Bond* called 'conviction', that would preserve the party from any tendency towards degeneration:

This self-activity of the members, this general education and conscious participation in the workers' struggle makes any emergence of a bureaucracy impossible within the party. On the organisational level, it is impossible to adopt effective measures against this [danger] should this self-activity and education ever be lacking; in this case, the party could no longer be considered as a communist party: the truly communist party, for which the class's self-activity is the fundamental idea, the party in which this idea is incarnated, in flesh and blood, right down to its every member ... A party with a communist programme may degenerate; a party made up of communists, never.

Traumatised by the Russian experience, the *Bond* thought that militant will and theoretical training were sufficient protection against the threat of degeneration. It thus tended to exalt the image of the 'pure militant', not subject as an individual to the pressure of 'bourgeois ideology'. In their conception of the party as a sum of individuals with 'the highest ambitions', the *Theses* expressed a certain voluntarism, or even naive idealism. The separation between a programme, the fruit of constant theoretical research, and militant will, led to the rejection of the idea of the party as an organic and programmatic body. If the party was only a sum of individual wills, there was no longer any need for a body that brought together all the militant cells. Two years later (see below), the *Bond* was to push this separation to the extreme.

### 3.3 *The 'Link with the Working Class'*

Born of the proletariat's mass-action, in the end the party's only guarantee lay in its ties with the proletariat: 'When this tie does not exist, when the Party is an organ situated outside the class-struggle, it has no other choice than to place itself – in a defeatist way – outside the class, or to subject the workers to its leadership by force. Thus, the party can only be truly revolutionary when it is anchored among the masses such that its activity is not, in general, distinct from that of the proletariat, other than in the sense that the working class's will, aspirations and conscious understanding are crystallised in the party.'

In this definition, the 'link with the class' seemed contradictory. The party catalysed the consciousness of the class in struggle, and simultaneously should merge with the proletariat. The *Bond* only sees the contradiction between party

and class in a process of degeneration, where the 'tie' is broken. This reflected the way in which all revolutionaries of the time were haunted by the fear of seeing a repetition of the horrors of the counter-revolution in Russia. Nonetheless, we cannot help remarking that the conjunction of the proletariat's historic goals with those of the party is not the same thing as a fusion between the two. The history of the workers' movement, and especially of the Russian and German revolutions, was the turbulent history of relations between the party and the class. In a revolutionary period, the party may disagree with the action of the class; thus the Bolsheviks disagreed with the Petrograd proletariat when it wanted to seize power in July 1917. It may also, like Rosa Luxemburg's *Spartakusbund*, agree with the 'will of the masses' in Berlin, in their impatience to seize power, and be decapitated for its troubles. In reality, there is rarely a 'fusion' between the party and the masses. Especially during the counter-revolution, but even during the revolutionary period, the party is more often 'against the current' than with it. Being – as the *Theses* show – a 'part of the class', it is distinct from the totality of the class when its principles and activity are not totally accepted by the mass of workers, or it may even encounter their hostility.

### 3.4 *Party and State in the Revolution*

The *Theses* published in December 1945 did not deal with the relationship between party and state during the seizure of power. The question was raised inside the *Bond*, and in March 1946 a pamphlet was published that included a chapter devoted to the problem: *Van slavenmaatschappij tot arbeidersmacht* ('From slave-holding society to workers' power').<sup>35</sup> From this, it was clear that the party could neither seize power, nor 'govern' the workers. 'Whatever party forms the government, it must rule against men, for capital, and by means of a bureaucracy'.<sup>36</sup> This is why the party, as both party and part of the workers' councils, remains distinct from the state:

It is a quite different party from those of bourgeois society. It does not, itself, take part in any form of holding power ... the proletarian seizure of power is neither the conquest of control of the state by a 'workers' party',

35 The pamphlet formed one of the *Bond's* programmatic foundations. It examined the question of power through the evolution of class societies from antiquity to capitalist society.

36 In *Southern Advocate for Workers' Councils* (SAWC), No. 33, Melbourne, May 1947. Pannekoek's *Five Theses* were reprinted by the *Informations et Correspondance Ouvrières* (ICO) group in the pamphlet *La grève généralisée en France, mai-juin 1968*, a supplement to *ICO*, No. 72.

nor the participation of such a party in the government of the state ... The state as such is completely foreign, in its essence, from workers' power; thus the forms of organisation of the workers' power have none of the characteristics of the exercise of power by the state.

It is undeniable that such positions on the party were closer to those of the KAPD than to Pannekoek's. Although the *Communistenbond Spartacus* published Pannekoek's *The Workers' Councils* in February 1946, it was, in fact, opposed to his ideas on organisation. Pannekoek only envisaged the organisation in the form of small discussion- and 'opinion'-groupings: 'tendency-organisations, leagues defending a common standpoint'.

However, contrary to what was to happen later, in 1946 it was the *Communistenbond* that influenced Pannekoek. In his *Five Theses on the Class Struggle*, he stated – contradicting his earlier theses – that the work of revolutionary parties 'is an indispensable part of the self-emancipation of the working class'.<sup>37</sup> True, he reduced their function to a solely theoretical and propagandistic one: 'The second function [the first being the conquest of political power], that is to say, spreading ideas and knowledge, studying, discussing, formulating ideas about society, and using propaganda to enlighten the spirit of the masses, falls to the parties'.

The oppositions that emerged within the *Bond* over the party-question during the preparation of the Christmas 1945 congress tended to change the nuances of the *Theses* rather than criticise them. At all events, they rejected Pannekoek's educationist theory. Draft-theses, accepted by two out of five of the political commission, insisted that 'the new party is not the class's teacher'. The draft aimed, above all, to clarify some points that had remained vague in the *Taak en Wezen van de nieuwe Partij*. In the first place, so as to better mark their break with Sneevliet's old RSAP, 'tactical' participation in elections was clearly rejected: 'Naturally, the party does not take part in any parliamentary activity'. Secondly, the draft's author thought that the *Theses* marked a return to the KAPD's activist conceptions, or rather to 'leaderist' tendencies in the class-struggle: 'The party does not lead any action, nor, as a party, does it lead any action by the class. Indeed, it fights precisely such subordination of the class and its movements to the leadership of any political group'.<sup>38</sup> In this spirit,

37 *Southern Advocate for Workers' Councils (SAWC)*, No. 33, Melbourne, May 1947.

38 'Stellingen over begrip en wezen van de partij' ('Theses on the concept and essence of the party'), in *UEK*, No. 1, December 1945. These theses formed the third draft submitted for discussion, but were not accepted by the *Bond's* congress.

the new party does not recognise any “leaders”; it ‘only executes the decisions of its members ... As long as a decision is maintained, it is valid for all the members.’

### 3.5 *The Splits*

Inevitably, the *Bond*’s orientation towards a centralised organisation, and the importance it accorded to theoretical reflection in the form of debates and educational sessions, did not satisfy its more activist elements. These latter, around Toon van de Berg, retained the old revolutionary-syndicalist spirit of the NAS. They had a strong presence amongst the Rotterdam workers, and during the July 1945 dock-strike, they founded an ‘autonomous’ section of the EVB (*Eenheids Vakbeweging*; Unitary Trade-Union Movement). It was highly symptomatic that during the *Bond*’s Christmas 1945 congress it agreed to work in the EVB, while condemning the organisation’s activity within the unions. Its position on the unions as appendages of the state thus remained a theoretical one. By leaving the *Bond* during the congress, Toon van de Berg and his supporters took their ‘tactical’ participation in ‘independent’ unions to its logical conclusion.<sup>39</sup>

The *Bond* was in the process of reappropriating the political positions of the GIC. It was feeling its way, more or less clearly, towards its own political and theoretical positions.

On the other hand, the centralisation that this political work demanded did not go down well with the *Bond*’s anarchistic elements. A serious conflict developed within the organisation over the paper *Spartacus*. Some, supported by part of the *Eind Redaktie* (the editorial commission), found that the paper’s style was ‘too journalistic’.<sup>40</sup> They wanted the paper to be produced by all the members, and not by a political organ. The conflict reached its height in March 1946, when a split occurred between the political commission (whose secretary was Stan Poppe) and the *Eind Redaktie*. The result was a decision that ‘the *Eind Redaktie* is subject to the political commission’ in the political choice of articles, but not in its style, which was left up to the editorial committee.<sup>41</sup> The political commission defended the principle of centralism through the common work of the two organs. The *Eind Redaktie* thought that its mandate was

39 On Toon van de Berg (1904–77), see the article by the *Spartacusbond* in *Spartacus*, No. 2, February–March 1978.

40 ‘Nota van de politieke commissie’ (‘Notes of the political commission’), in *UEK*, No. 2, March 1946.

41 Ibid.

valid solely before an assembly of all the *Bond's* members. It looked for support from the young militants, who wanted the paper to be an expression of the whole membership, whereas the majority of the political commission, and Stan Poppe in particular, defended the principle that articles should be controlled politically by a responsible organ. The *Eind Redaktie* should thus be a 'subdivision' of the political commission. Militants' participation in the editorial committee should be according to the principal of 'workers' democracy', and not the 'democratic centralism' which dominated in the 'old-style' organs.<sup>42</sup> This was no 'policy of compromise' as the majority of the editorial commission and the Amsterdam membership claimed, but a practical question of the two organs working in common, based on the control and participation of all the *Bond's* members.

This confused debate, which intermingled the specificities of each commission and personal antagonisms, simply brought the question of centralisation out into the open. The original failure to distinguish between the political commission and the editorial board as a part of the latter only poisoned the atmosphere further.

This serious crisis in the *Bond* led to the departure of several militants, and far from triumphing, the *Bond's* centralisation became increasingly vague during 1946.

However, in real terms the departure of the *Bond's* most confused, or most activist members, strengthened its political clarity, and the *Bond* began to mark itself out more clearly from the surrounding political milieu. Thus the summer of 1946 saw the departure of militants who had voted for the CP in the elections. The same happened with the members of the Deventer section, who had contacted the Trotskyists of the CRM with a view to conducting 'entryism' in the Dutch CP.<sup>43</sup>

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42 At the same time as the debate over centralism, a split arose between 'academic' elements, and militants wanting more propaganda. The latter, like Johan van Dinkel, denounced the danger of the *Bond* becoming 'a club for theoretical study'. See 'Waar staat de Communistenbond? Theoretische studieclub of wordende Party' ('Where is the *Communistenbond* going? A theoretical study-club, or a party in formation?'), *UEK*, No. 2, March 1946.

43 See the internal circular of 17 August 1946, containing the proceedings of the meeting of the national political commission on 14 July, in particular the interventions of Stan Poppe, Bertus Nansink, Bruun van Albada, Jan Vastenhout and Theo Maassen on the state of the organisation.

## 4 The Political Record of *the Communistenbond*

In 1945–6, the *Bond* examined several theoretical questions that had remained vague during its period of clandestinity: the Russian, national and trade-union questions. The questions of the workers' councils, of the class-struggle in the postwar period, of barbarism and science, and the characteristics of the period following the Second World-War, were all considered in the light of Pannekoek's contribution.

### 4.1 *The Russian Question*

The *Bond* had not really dealt with the nature of the Russian state since its formation. The conferences of 1945, and a theoretical article on the question, made it possible to take up an unambiguous position.<sup>44</sup> While it rendered homage to the MLL-Front's position of revolutionary defeatism during the Russian-German war in 1941, it noted that 'the Front's attitude towards the Soviet Union was still hesitant'. In fact, in 1942–4 they had shared this hesitation with the *Bond*. By 1945, this was no longer the case.

For the article's author, revolutionaries 'could not and would not believe that the revolutionary Russia of 1917' had been transformed into a power similar to other capitalist countries.

During the 1930s, the *Bond*, unlike the GIC, did not define the Russian Revolution as 'bourgeois'. It tried to understand the stages of the revolution's transformation into a counter-revolution. Like the Italian communist left of *Bilan*, it detected a counter-revolutionary process above all in the Russian state's foreign policy, which marked its integration into the capitalist world. This process had several stages: the Rapallo Treaty in 1922; the alliance with the *Kuomintang* in China; and the USSR's entry into the League of Nations in 1934. However, the *Bond* considered that Russia had only become truly imperialist in 1939. The definition it gave of imperialism was purely military, and not an economic one: 'Since 1939, it has become clear that Russia also is engaged in a phase of imperialist expansion'.

However, the *Bond* also showed the internal counter-revolution, where 'a state-bureaucracy was born under Stalin's leadership'. The class nature of the Russian bureaucracy was bourgeois: 'The ruling bureaucracy fulfils the function of a ruling class, whose essential goals correspond to the role of the bourgeoisie in modern capitalist countries'.

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44 'Het russisch imperialisme en de revolutionnaire arbeiders' ('Russian imperialism and the revolutionary workers'), *Maandblad Spartacus*, No. 12, December 1945.



It should be noted, here, that the Russian bureaucracy is seen as bourgeois by its function, rather than by its nature. It is an agent of state-controlled capital. Although it is clear in the rest of the article that this 'bureaucracy' is the form taken by the USSR's state-bourgeoisie, this gives the impression that in fact it is a 'new class', especially when we read that 'the bureaucracy has become the new ruling class'. A few years later, perhaps under the influence of Milovan Djilas's 1957 book *The New Class*, this 'ruling class' was to become 'a new class', a 'managerial class'.

The *Bond* argued that there existed two classes in Russian society, within capitalist relations of production based on 'the accumulation of surplus-value': the working class and the 'ruling class'. The existence of state-capitalism – as a collective capital – explained the Russian state's imperialist policy:

The state itself is the sole capitalist, by excluding all other autonomous capitalist agents; it is a monstrous organisation of global capital. Thus, on one side are the wage-workers, who make up the class of the oppressed; on the other, the state, which exploits the oppressed class, and whose domination is furthered by the appropriation of the surplus-value created by the working class. This is the foundation of Russian society; it is also the source of its imperialist policy.

The – implicit – distinction made here between 'ruled and rulers', which was present in Djilas, can be seen as a forerunner of the future theory of the *Socialisme ou Barbarie* group.<sup>45</sup> Unlike the latter, however, the *Communistenbond Spartacus* never abandoned the Marxist vision of class-antagonism within capitalist society.

Despite some hesitations in its theoretical analyses, the *Bond* was extremely clear as to their political consequences. Refusal to defend the capitalist USSR was a class-frontier between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat: 'Taking Russia's side means abandoning the workers' class-front against capitalism'.

Refusal to defend the USSR could only be revolutionary if it was accompanied by a call for the overthrow of the capitalist state in Russia by class-struggle and the formation of workers' councils:

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45 The *Socialisme ou Barbarie* group was a split from Trotskyism. Its first issue was published in 1949. Its leading light was Cornelius Castoriadis (*alias* Chaulieu or Cardan). The theories of 'rulers/ruled' and 'leaders/led' were taken to their logical conclusion largely by spin-offs of *Socialisme ou Barbarie* such as ICO. After the collapse of ICO, Henri Simon published *Liaisons*.

Only the soviets, the workers' councils, as an autonomous workers' power, can take production in hand with a view to producing for the needs of the working population. In Russia, too, the workers must form the Third Front. From this point of view, there is no difference between Russia and other countries.

#### 4.2 *The Colonial and National Question*

It was the beginning of a colonial war in Indonesia, which was to last until independence, and involved some 150,000 Dutch soldiers sent to re-conquer the Indonesian Archipelago after the defeat of Japan (which had granted 'independence' to Sukarno in April 1945). As the United States, whose objective was to control South Asia, suspended postwar aid to the Netherlands (Marshall-Plan money), the Dutch government had to transfer sovereignty to the 'Republic of the United States of Indonesia' in December 1949.

In 1945, the *Bond's* position on the colonial question was barely different from that of the MLL-Front. The *Bond* called for the 'separation' of the Dutch East Indies and the Netherlands. Its position on the colonial question remained a Leninist one, and it even took part for a few months in an 'anti-imperialist struggle-committee' (*Anti-imperialistisch Strijd Comité*). This group brought together the Trotskyist CRM, the left-pacifist socialist group *De Vonk* and the *Communistenbond*, until the latter left it in December 1945. The *Bond* admitted that this committee was nothing but a 'cartel of organisations'.<sup>46</sup>

In fact, the *Bond* had no theoretical position on the national and colonial question. Implicitly, it adopted the positions of the Comintern's Second Congress. It thus stated that 'the liberation of Indonesia is subordinate to and constitutes a component of the world-proletariat's class-struggle'.<sup>47</sup> At the same time, it showed that Indonesian independence was a dead end for the proletariat as a whole: 'There is no possibility at present of a proletarian revolution [in Indonesia]'.<sup>48</sup>

Little-by-little, Pannekoek's conception gained influence. In *The Workers' Councils*, without really taking a position against the nationalist 'liberation'-movements, Pannekoek argued that they would take place under American tutelage, and would lead to the industrialisation of the 'liberated' countries. This was the *Bond's* official position on the Indonesian question in September 1945.<sup>48</sup> He considered that 'the only remaining way forwards is a future

46 The *Bond's* conference of 27–28 October 1945. See *UEK*, No. 6, December 1945.

47 Report of a member of the political commission on the Indonesian question, *UEK*, No. 6, December 1945.

48 'Nederland-Indonesië', *Maandblad Spartacus*, No. 9, September 1945.

industrialisation of Indonesia, and a further intensification of labour'. The decolonisation-movement would be 'supported by American capital'. It would be expressed in the creation of a state-apparatus 'turned against the poor'.

The *Bond* still had great difficulty in determining its theoretical position on the 'national question'. Having sprung from two different currents, one of which accepted the Baku Theses, while the other had adopted Luxemburg's conception, it was forced to opt clearly for one or the other. It did so in 1946, in an issue of its weekly press.<sup>49</sup> In an article devoted to national independence (*Nationale onafhankelijkheid*), it attacked the Trotskyist position of the RCP, whose slogan was '*Indonesië los van Holland, nu!*' ('Separation of Holland and Indonesia, now!'). Such a slogan could not be anything but a call for the exploitation of the Indonesian workers by other imperialisms: "*Indonesië los van Holland, nu!*" means: "exploitation of the Indonesian proletarians by Britain and America, Australia, and/or their own new rulers". The struggle of the Indonesian masses must rise against all exploitation!'

At a deeper level, the *Bond* unambiguously adopted Rosa Luxemburg's conception, and rejected any Leninist-type slogan of the 'right of nations to self-determination'. This could only mean abandoning internationalism for the imperialist camp: 'Any sympathy for this slogan means putting the working class on the side of one of the two rival imperialist colossi, just like the "right of nations to self-determination" in 1914, and [the struggle] "against German fascism" during the Second World-War.'

The *Bond* thus definitively abandoned its position of 1942. Later, when countries like India and China gained their independence, its main concern was to see how far 'independence' could lead to a development of the productive forces, and so objectively encourage the emergence of a powerful industrial proletariat. Implicitly, the *Bond* posed the question of 'bourgeois revolutions' in the Third World (see below).

### 4.3 *The Union-Question*

The Unitary Trade-Union Movement (EVB) was born in 1943. Members of the Communist Party (CPN), the Trotskyist CRM ('Committee of Marxist Revolutionaries'), and some members of the *Communistenbond Spartacus* took part in its foundation. In the autumn of 1945, the EVB changed its name to 'Unitary Union Central' (EVC). This was no longer a little union like the NAS, but a large union-organisation, with some 200,000 members in 1945 – almost as many as the Social-Democratic NVV. Its presence among the workers was espe-

49 *Spartacus-Weekblad*, No. 12, 23 March 1946.

cially reinforced by several big strikes in 1945 and 1946, above all in ports like Rotterdam.

These strikes also strengthened the CPN, which in May 1946 scored the best electoral results of its history (10.6 percent in 1946; 2.4 percent in 1959; 4.7 percent in 1972; 0.6 percent in 1986). The Stalinist party obtained 10 seats in Parliament, had 50,000 members (as compared to 15,200 in 1978), and 300,000 subscribers to its press.

Following its Christmas 1945 congress, the *Bond* had abandoned all union-work: it nonetheless sent delegates to the EVC congress on 29 July 1946.<sup>50</sup> However, for tactical purposes part of the *Bond* worked in the EVC's 'autonomous sections', such as Rotterdam, which counted some 3,400 workers after the dock-strike (28 June–5 July 1945). Since its foundation, the *Bond* had officially defended the principle of 'factory-councils' (*Bedrijfsraad*) created spontaneously by the workers, forming 'kernels' which were to gather together the conscious workers by 'locality and company'.<sup>51</sup> In fact, the *Bond* was simply repeating the KAPD's old conception of the *Unionen* and *Betriebsorganisationen* (factory-organisations). Unlike the KAPD, however, the *Bond* also carried out trade-union work, under the pressure of workers who still fostered illusions as to the formation of 'real revolutionary unions'. This was the case in 1948–9, when the OVB (Independent Union of Enterprise-Organisations) was founded. The OVB was formed by a split, in March 1948, from the Rotterdam EVC, provoked by Van de Berg as a response to the CP's grip on the EVC. Later, the *Bond* was to claim that the OVB was nothing but 'a little union'. In reality, the OVB in 1948 had 10,000 members!<sup>52</sup>

The *Bond's* trade-unionist 'tactic' stood in contradiction with its theoretical position on the role and function of unions in Western countries' 'semi-totalitarian society'. The unions had become organs of the capitalist state:

50 Decision of the political commission, 14 July 1946. See circular of 27 August with the proceedings of the central organ's meeting.

51 'Het wezen der revolutionnaire bedrijfsorganisatie' ('The nature of revolutionary organisation in the enterprise'), *Spartacus Weekblad*, No. 23, 7 June 1947.

52 In 1951, some members of the *Bond* thought that the OVB was nothing other than an 'old union', which they had no business dealing with. This was the point of view of *Spartacus* in 1978, which defined the OVB as 'a small trade-union organisation'. See the article 'Toon van de Berg' (No. 2, February/March). The debate on the nature of the OVB can be found in *UEK*, No. 17, 22 July 1951. In fact, the Dutch Trotskyists played an important role in the OVB, and one of their leaders, Herman Drenth (1916–2000), a founder of the CRM in 1941, was in the union's leading bodies.

There can be no question using the trades-unions in the struggle over working-conditions. The unions have become an integral part of the capitalist social order. Their existence and disappearance are irrevocably tied to the survival and collapse of capitalism. In the future, there will be no question of the working class still getting any benefit from the unions. Wherever the workers have begun and conducted a strike spontaneously, the unions have showed themselves to be strike-breakers.<sup>53</sup>

The *Bond's* propaganda was thus an unequivocal denunciation of the unions. Not only should the workers carry out their own struggle against the unions, through the 'wildcat-strike', they should also understand that any struggle conducted by the unions was a defeat: 'Revolutionary propaganda does not call for the transformation of the unions; it consists in showing clearly that in the struggle the workers must thrust aside any union-leadership, like vermin from their body. It must be said clearly that any struggle is lost in advance as soon as the unions manage to take control of it.'

The 'wildcat-strike' against the unions was the precondition for the formation of proletarian organisations in the struggle.

#### 4.4 *The Development of the Class-Struggle and the Councils*

The publication of *The Workers' Councils* in January 1946 was a determining factor in orientating the *Bond* towards typically 'councilist' positions. Whereas before, the *Communistenbond Spartacus* had had an essentially political vision of the class-struggle, it began to develop more and more economic positions. The class-struggle was seen more as an economic movement than as a process of increasing proletarian organisation.

Pannekoek's vision of the class-struggle insisted more on the need for a general organisation of the class, than on the process of struggle. 'Organisation', he declared, 'is the vital principle of the working class, the precondition of its emancipation'.<sup>54</sup> This clear affirmation demonstrates that the council-communist conception of the time was not the same as that of anarchism. Contrary to the latter, Pannekoek insisted that the class-struggle is less a matter of 'direct action', than of a developing awareness of the goals of the struggle, and that consciousness precedes action:

53 *De Nieuwe Wereld*, April 1947, translated into bad French for the 1947 conference and published as a pamphlet, *Le Monde Nouveau*.

54 Pannekoek 1974a, chapter on 'Direct Action'.

Spiritual development is the most important factor in the proletariat's seizure of power. The proletarian revolution is not the product of brute physical force; it is a victory of the spirit ... in the beginning comes action. But action is nothing more than the beginning ... Any unawareness, any illusion as to the essence, the goal, or as to the strength of the adversary, will end in failure and defeat will establish a new slavery.<sup>55</sup>

It was this consciousness, developing within the class, which made possible the outbreak of unofficial or illegal strikes, 'in opposition to the strikes declared by the trades-unions, respecting the law'. Spontaneity is not the negation of organisation; on the contrary, 'organisation is born spontaneously, immediately'.

But neither consciousness, nor the organisation of the struggle, are aims in themselves. They are expressions of a praxis where consciousness and organisation are part of a practical process of extending the struggle, which serves to unite the proletariat: '... the wildcat-strike, like a prairie-fire, spreads to other workplaces and draws in ever greater masses ... The first task to be accomplished, and the most important, is propaganda to try to extend the strike'.

This idea of extending the unofficial strike nonetheless contradicted the idea of factory-occupations advanced by Pannekoek. Like the militants of the *Bond*, Pannekoek had been highly influenced by the factory-occupations of the 1930s. Factory-occupations have passed into history under the name of 'Polish strikes', ever since the Polish miners were the first to apply this tactic, in 1931. Occupations then spread to Romania and Hungary, then to Belgium in 1935, and finally to France in 1936.

At the time, the Italian communist left around *Bilan*, while saluting these explosions of workers' struggle, showed that these occupations closed the workers up in the factories, which corresponded to a counter-revolutionary course leading to war.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, a revolutionary course would be expressed essentially by a movement spreading the struggle, culminating in the emergence of the workers' councils. The appearance of the councils would not necessarily mean stopping production and the occupation of the factories. On the contrary, during the Russian Revolution, the factories continued to run, under the control of the factory-councils; the movement was not one of factory-occupations, but the councils' political and economic domination of the productive process, through daily mass-meetings. This is why, when the workers of northern Italy transformed their factories into 'fortresses' during the occu-

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55 Pannekoek 1974a, chapter on 'Thought and Action'.

56 Bourrinet 1999, Chapter Four.

pations of 1920, it expressed a declining revolutionary movement. This was why Bordiga vigorously criticised Gramsci, who had become the theoretician of the idea that power lay in the occupied factory.

For the Italian communist left, it was necessary for the workers to break the ties attaching them to the factory, to create a class unity that went beyond the narrow framework of the workplace. On this question, Pannekoek and the *Spartacusbond* stood close to Gramsci's 'factoryist' conceptions of 1920. They considered the struggle in the factory as an end in itself, given that the task of the workers was the management of the productive apparatus, as a first step after the conquest of power: '... in the factory-occupations, they sketch out the future that relies on the clearest awareness that the factories belong to the workers, that together they form a harmonious unity, and that the struggle for liberty will be fought to the end in and through the factories ... Here, the workers become aware of their close ties to the factory ... it is a productive apparatus that they set in motion, a body that only becomes a living part of society through their labour.'<sup>57</sup>

Unlike Pannekoek, the *Bond* tended to ignore the different phases of the class-struggle, and to confuse the immediate struggle (unofficial strikes) with the revolutionary struggle (mass-strike giving birth to the councils). Any strike-committee – whatever the historical period, or phase of the class-struggle – was likened to a workers' council: 'The strike-committee includes delegates from different companies. It is then called a "general strike-committee"; but we could call it "a workers' council"'.<sup>58</sup>

Pannekoek, by contrast, emphasised in his *Five Theses on the Class Struggle* that the wildcat-strike can only become revolutionary inasmuch as it is 'a struggle against the state'; in this case, 'the strike-committees will have to fulfil general, political, and social functions, in other words fulfil the tasks of workers' councils'.

Pannekoek's conception of the councils was far-removed from anarchist positions. Remaining faithful to Marxism, he rejected neither 'class-violence' against the state, nor the 'dictatorship' of the proletariat. But neither of these

57 Pannekoek 1974a, chapter on 'The Factory-Occupation'.

58 See *Le Monde nouveau*, 1947, p. 12. Like Pannekoek, the *Bond* had a tendency to see strike-committees as permanent bodies, which would remain once the struggle was over. Pannekoek thus called – since the strike was over – for the formation of small independent unions, 'intermediate forms ... regrouping, after a large strike, the nucleus of the best militants into a single union. Wherever the strike breaks out spontaneously, this union will be present with its experienced organisers and propagandists' (Pannekoek 1974a).

could be an end in itself. Both were strictly subordinated to the communist goal: the emancipation of the proletariat, made conscious by its struggle, and whose principle of action was workers' democracy. The workers' council-based revolution was not 'a brutal and unthinking force that only knows how to destroy': '... Revolutions, on the contrary, are new edifices that result from new forms of organisation and thought. Revolutions are constructive periods in the evolution of humanity'. This is why 'while armed action also plays a great role in the class-struggle', it is in the service of a goal: 'not to break heads, but to open minds'. In this sense, the dictatorship of the proletariat was the proletariat's freedom through the creation of true workers' democracy: 'Marx's conception of the dictatorship of the proletariat appears identical to the workers' democracy of the council-organisation'.

However, Pannekoek's conception of workers' councils ducked the question of its exercise of power against other classes and the state. The councils appeared simply as the reflection of different opinions among the workers. They were to be a parliament, where different working-groups would co-exist, but without either executive or legislative powers. They were not instruments of proletarian power, but informal assemblies: 'The councils do not govern; they transmit the opinions, intentions, and will of the working-groups'.

As so often in *The Workers' Councils*, one assertion is followed by its opposite, such that it is difficult to trace any coherent line of thought. Whereas in the passage we have just quoted, the workers councils appear as powerless, they are later defined as powerful organs 'which must fulfil political functions', and where 'what is decided is put into practice by the workers'. This implies that the councils 'establish the new rule of law'.

By contrast, there is nowhere any mention of an antagonism between the councils and the new state produced by the revolution. Although the Russian Revolution posed the question, Pannekoek implicitly seems to consider the councils as a state, whose role will increasingly be an economic one, once the workers have 'made themselves masters of the factories'. The councils would then cease to be political organs, to be 'transformed ... into organs of production'.<sup>59</sup> In this light, it is hard to see how Pannekoek's theory of the councils differed from that of the Bolsheviks after 1918.

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59 Pannekoek 1974a, chapter on 'The Workers' Revolution'.



## 5 The 'Brussels International Conference' (25–26 May 1947)

In the space of two years – from 1945 to 1947 – the divide narrowed between the theoretical conceptions of the *Communistenbond Spartacus* and the 'councilist' theories of the GIC and Pannekoek, although the latter was never a *Bond* militant.<sup>60</sup>

There are many factors to be taken into account to explain the sharp contrast between the *Bond* of 1945 and the *Bond* of 1947. Initially, the influx of militants after May 1945 had given the impression that a revolutionary period was opening up; the *Bond* believed that the revolution would inevitably arise from the war. Its hopes were reinforced by the outbreak of 'wildcat'-strikes in Rotterdam in June 1945, directed against the unions. At a deeper level, the organisation did not believe in the possibility of the reconstruction of the world-economy, but thought in August 1945 that 'the capitalist era in the history of mankind is coming to an end'.<sup>61</sup> This sentiment was echoed by Pannekoek, who wrote: 'Today, we are witnessing the beginning of the collapse of capitalism as an economic system'.<sup>62</sup>

However, with the beginning of the reconstruction-period, the *Bond* soon had to acknowledge that neither revolution nor economic collapse were imminent. Nevertheless, the *Bond* and Pannekoek always remained convinced of the historical perspective of communism; certainly, 'a large part of the road towards barbarism is behind us, but the other road, the road towards socialism, remains open'.<sup>63</sup>

The onset of the Cold War left the *Bond* undecided about the historical course of the postwar period. On the one hand it believed, together with Pannekoek, that the postwar period was opening up new markets to American capital linked with reconstruction and decolonisation and even with the arms-economy. On the other hand each strike appeared to the *Bond* as a 'small-scale revolution'. Although the strikes more and more took place within the context of the confrontation between imperialist blocs, at the time *Spartacus*

60 Pannekoek only had individual contacts with the old members of the GIC: H. Canne Meijer and B.A. Sijes.

61 'Het zieke kapitalisme' ('Sick Capitalism'), *Maandblad Spartacus*, No. 8, August 1945.

62 Pannekoek 1974a. This idea of a collapse of capitalism contradicted another thesis in *The Workers' Councils*: the idea that capitalism would undergo a new phase of expansion as a result of decolonisation: 'Once it has brought under its rule the teeming millions of China and India's fertile plains, capitalism will have fulfilled its essential tasks'.

63 *Maandblad Spartacus*, No. 8, August 1945.

thought that 'it is the class-struggle that is holding back preparations for a third world-war'.<sup>64</sup>

In a historical course profoundly depressing for revolutionaries of the time, the expected revolution did not come. The moral authority of Pannekoek and Canne Meijer weighed more and more in favour of a return to the mode of functioning that had prevailed in the late GIC. In the spring of 1947, criticisms on the concept of the party began to be expressed openly. The former members of the GIC pressed for a return to the structure of 'study-groups' and 'working-groups'. In fact, this return had been prepared starting in 1946, when the *Bond* had asked Canne Meijer to take the responsibility for the edition of a review in Esperanto, and so to form an Esperantist group.<sup>65</sup>

In effect, separate groups were forming inside the *Bond*. In their intervention, the *Bond's* militants tended more and more to consider themselves as a sum of individuals in the service of workers' struggles.

Meanwhile, despite the non-revolutionary historical course that it was later forced to acknowledge, the *Communistenbond* was not isolated.<sup>66</sup> The *Socialisme van onderop* ('Socialism from below') group, led by the anarchist antimilitarist Albert de Jong, had also been formed in the Netherlands. But it was, above all, with Flemish-speaking Belgium that the *Bond* maintained its closest contacts. In 1945, a group very close to the *Bond* had been formed, which published the review *Arbeiderswil* ('Workers' Will'). Later, it took on the name of *Vereeniging van Radensocialisten* ('Association of Council-Socialists'). The group declared itself in favour of the 'power of the councils' and of 'anti-militarism'. It was very close to anarchism in its organisational principle of federation.<sup>67</sup>

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64 'Nog twee jaren' ('Two more years'), *Spartacus* (Weekblad), No. 22, 31 May 1947.

65 In 1946, the *Bond* had asked Canne Meijer to bring out a periodical in Esperanto: *Klasbatalo*. In 1951, another attempt was made to bring out *Spartacus* in Esperanto. The intellectuals' fixation with this language explains the relatively small efforts made by the *Bond* to publish its texts in Esperanto.

66 The GIC preface to Appel 1950 speaks of 'a situation which is certainly not revolutionary'; it does not use the concept of counter-revolution to define the period. This preface had a dual aim: a) to examine the new tendency towards state-capitalism and its variations (in Russia, the state runs the economy, whereas in America it is the monopolies that have seized control of the state); b) to assert the need for immediate economic struggle as the basis for 'new experience', which would bear the seed of a 'new period'.

67 The 'Provisional Statutes' of the *Vereeniging van Radensocialisten* were published in April 1947 in *UEK*, No. 5.

This political environment dominated by localist groups encouraged the *Bond* to withdraw within Dutch borders. Nonetheless, in 1946 the *Bond* took care to make the positions of the Bordigist current known to its members, by translating the 'Declaration of Principles' of the Belgian Fraction of the Communist Left.<sup>68</sup> In July 1946, Canne Meijer moved to Paris in order to make contact with various groups such as the GCF (*Internationalisme*) that had come out of Bordigism. Theo Maassen renewed this effort by making contact with the internationalist milieu in France. It is noteworthy that the contacts were made by former members of the GIC and not by the ex-RSAP, who only kept political contact with the group around Vereeken. The former, who originated in the council-communist movement of the 1920s and 1930s, had already been in discussions with the 'Bordigist' current regrouped around the periodical *Bilan*.

In 1947 the *Bond* remained very open to international discussion and hoped to break out of its national and linguistic limitations: 'The *Bond* in no way wants to be a specifically Dutch organisation. State-frontiers – the result of history and capitalism – are to it nothing but obstacles to the unity of the international working class'.<sup>69</sup>

It was in this spirit that the *Bond* took the initiative of calling an international conference of revolutionary groups in Europe. The conference was held in Brussels on 25–26 May 1947. As a discussion-paper, the *Bond* had written a pamphlet entitled: *De nieuwe wereld* ('The New World'), which it had translated into French for the occasion.

This first postwar conference of internationalist groups had to be based on selection-criteria. Without stating this explicitly, the *Bond* excluded the Trotskyist groups because of their support for the USSR and their participation in the Resistance. At the same time, it had chosen very broad, and even vague, criteria for participation in the conference:

We consider essential: the rejection of all kinds of parliamentarism; the understanding that the masses have to organise themselves in action, directing their own battles by themselves. At the centre of discussion there is also the question of the mass-movement, whereas the questions of the new communist [or 'communitarian'] economy, of the formation of parties or groups, of the dictatorship of the proletariat, and so on can only be considered as consequences of the preceding point. This is because

68 The translation of the 'Draft-Programme of the Belgian Fraction', with comments from the Leiden nucleus, can be found in the bulletin of 2 August 1946.

69 UEK, bulletin of the Christmas conference, December 1947.

communism is not a party-question, but the question of the creation of an autonomous mass-movement.<sup>70</sup>

As a result, the *Bond* 'excluded' the Bordigist *Partito Comunista Internazionalista* of Italy, which took part in elections. By contrast, it invited the autonomous Federation of Turin – which had left the PCInt because of divergences on the parliamentary question – and the French group *Internationalisme*, which had detached itself from Bordigism, as well as the Belgian and French Bordigist groups that had differences with the PCInt on the parliamentary and colonial questions. It also invited the SPGB as 'observers', one week before the conference, with a view to the formation of an international-liaison commission, in spite of this group's participation in the 1945 British election, perhaps because it rejected the October Revolution as 'non-proletarian'. The executive committee of the SPGB did not send delegates, but only a statement.

Apart from these groups, originating in Bordigism or linked to it in opposition, the *Communistenbond* invited informal groups – and even individuals representing nothing but themselves – from the 'anarcho-councilist' tendency: from the Netherlands, the group *Socialisme van onderop*; from Belgium, the *Vereeniging van Radensocialisten*; from Switzerland (Zürich), the councilist group *Klassenkampf*; from France, the revolutionary communists of *Le Pro-létaire*.<sup>71</sup>

The invitation of the French Anarchist Federation was criticised by the group *Internationalisme*, which insisted that there should be 'rigorous criteria' for the conference. The official anarchist movements that had participated in the war in Spain, then in the *maquis* of the Resistance, had to be excluded. The *Internationalisme* group determined four selection-criteria for groups participating in an 'internationalist conference', in fact, criteria only consisting of 'rejection':

70 Quoted in *Spartakus* No. 1, Zürich, October 1947: *Die Internationale*, 'Versammlung in Brüssel, Pfingsten 1947', anonymous article by the Austrian Georg Scheuer (1915–96). *Spartakus* was the organ of the RKD (Revolutionary Communists of Germany) linked to the OCR (*Organisation des communistes-révolutionnaires*), a French group, which published *Le Prolétaire*.

71 Proceedings of the conference in *Spartakus*, No. 1, Zürich, October 1947, and in *Internationalisme*, No. 23, 15 June 1947. Letter from the GCF to the *Communistenbond Spartacus*; 'An international conference of revolutionary groupings'; 'Rectification' – all in *Internationalisme*, No. 24, July 1947. The SPGB mentioned the invitation to the conference during meetings of its executive committee. Some delegates wished to send representatives to Brussels. (See 'Minutes of the meetings of the 44th E.C.' of the SPGB, May–October 1947, SPGB Archives.)

- The rejection of Trotskyism, ‘as a political body outside the proletariat’;
- The rejection of the official anarchist current for ‘the participation of their Spanish comrades in the capitalist government from 1936 to 1938’; their participation ‘in the imperialist war in Spain under the pretext of anti-fascism’, and ‘in the *maquis* of the Resistance in France’ meant that this current ‘has no place in an assembly of the proletariat’;
- General rejection of all groups that ‘have participated in one way or another in the imperialist war of 1939–45’;
- The recognition of the historical significance of October 1917 as a ‘fundamental criterion for every organisation that claims to be proletarian’.

These four criteria ‘simply delineate the class-frontiers separating the proletariat from capitalism’. However, the *Bond* did not withdraw its invitation to *Le Libertaire* (French Anarchist Federation).

That international conference could do no more than initiate contacts between new groups created since 1945, and the pre-war internationalist organisations, which had been isolated in their respective countries by the world-war. In no way could it become a new Zimmerwald, as the group *Le Prolétaire* proposed. But it was a site for a political and theoretical exchange, permitting the ‘organic existence’ and the ‘ideological development’ of the groups and organisations involved.

The French group *Internationalisme* participated actively in the conference, and pointed out that the international context made a revolutionary course impossible. The period was one in which ‘the proletariat has undergone a disastrous defeat, opening a reactionary course in the world’. The task of the day was, therefore, to close ranks and work towards the creation of a space for political discussion, such as would permit the weaker groups to escape from the devastating effects of this reactionary course.

This was also the opinion of the ex-GIC members of the *Bond*. And it was no accident that two ex-members of the GIC (Canne Meijer and Willems), but not one member of the *Bond*’s leadership, took part in the conference. The ex-members of the RSAP remained very localist, despite the fact that the *Bond* had created an ‘international-liaison commission’.

In general, there was great distrust between the different groups invited, many of which were afraid of political confrontation. Even the Belgian Fraction was only persuaded to take part in the debates by an explicit request from Marco (Marc Chirik) of *Internationalisme*. *Internationalisme* and the autonomous Federation of Turin had sent official delegations. The former members of the GIC, already in a minority within the *Spartacusbond*, represented nobody but themselves. They fostered a certain mistrust towards *Internationalisme*,

which they accused of 'losing itself in interminable discussions about the Russian Revolution'.<sup>72</sup>

Chaired by Willems, a former GIC member, Marc Chirik (1907–90) of *Internationalisme*, and an old Belgian anarcho-communist – a militant for more than sixty years who had known Engels at the 1891 International Conference of Socialists in Brussels – the conference ultimately revealed substantial agreement on a number of ideas.

- The majority of the groups rejected Burnham's theories on the 'managerial society' and the indefinite development of the capitalist system. The historical period was that of 'decadent capitalism, of permanent crisis finding its structural and political expression in state-capitalism'.
- With the exception of the anarchistic elements present, the council-communists agreed with the groups originating in 'Bordigism' on the necessity of a revolutionary organisation. Meanwhile, contrary to their conception of 1945, they saw the parties as gatherings of individuals who were the bearers of a proletarian science: 'The new revolutionary parties are thus the bearers or the laboratories of proletarian knowledge'. Taking up Pannekoek's conception of the role of individuals, they affirmed that 'at first, it is individuals that become aware of these new truths'. – A majority of the participants supported the intervention of Marco from *Internationalisme*, to the effect that neither the Trotskyist current nor the anarchists had any place 'in a conference of revolutionary groups'.<sup>73</sup> Only the representative of *Le Prolétaire* – a group which was to evolve towards anarchism – defended the invitation of unofficial or 'left-tendencies' of these currents.
- Those groups present rejected all syndicalist or parliamentarist 'tactics'. The silence of the opposition 'Bordigist' groups indicated their disagreement with the positions of the Italian Bordigist party.

It is significant that this conference of internationalist groups – the most important in the immediate aftermath of the war – had gathered together organisations from both the 'Bordigist' and council-communist currents. This was the first and also the last attempt at political exchange in the aftermath of the war. In the 1930s such an attempt had been impossible, first and foremost because of the terrible isolation of these currents, and also because of their

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72 Account of a journey to contact the RKD-CR group and *Internationalisme* in August 1946. See *UEK*, No. 4, April 1947.

73 Quoted from the congress-proceedings in *Internationalisme*, No. 23, 1947.

divergences on the Spanish question. Essentially, the 1947 conference made it possible to draw a line vis-à-vis the Trotskyist and anarchist currents on the questions of the war and of anti-fascism. In a confused way, it translated the common feeling that the beginning of the Cold War meant the end of a very short two-year period that had seen the development of new organisations. In the new course now opening up, these forces would be dispersed unless they consciously maintained a basic level of political contacts.

This general awareness was lacking at the conference, and it concluded without taking any political decisions or common resolutions. Only the former members of the GIC and *Internationalisme* declared themselves in favour of holding further conferences. This project came to nothing because of the departure of the majority of the ex-GIC members from the *Bond* on 3 August 1947.<sup>74</sup> Except for Theo Maassen and Jan Appel, who judged the split unjustified, they considered their divergences too important to be able to stay in the *Communistenbond*. The latter had decided to create – artificially – an ‘International Federation of Factory-Nuclei’ (IFBK) in the image of the KAPD’s *Betriebsorganisationen*. But the fundamental cause of the split was the question of militant and organised activity in workers’ struggles. The ex-members of the GIC were accused by the *Bond*’s militants of wanting to transform the organisation into a ‘circle for theoretical studies’, and thus of rejecting immediate workers’ struggles: ‘The point of view of these ex-members [of the GIC] was that, while continuing propaganda for “production in the hands of the factory-organisations”; “all power to the workers’ councils” and for “communist production on the basis of a price-calculation in relation to average working-time”, the *Spartacusbond* did not have to intervene in the workers’ struggle as it presents itself today. The propaganda of the *Spartacusbond* had to be pure in its principles, and, if the masses were not interested today, this would change when the mass-movements become revolutionary again.’<sup>75</sup>

By an irony of history, the ex-members of the GIC were repeating the same arguments that the Gorter tendency (known as the Essen tendency) had used in the 1920s, and in opposition to which the GIC had itself been formed in 1927. Because it defended active intervention in the economic struggle – the position of the Berlin tendency of the KAPD – it had been able to escape from the rapid process of disintegration that Gorter’s partisans had undergone. The latter had either disappeared politically or – as an organisation – had evolved towards

74 Circular-letter of 10 August 1947: ‘De splijting in de Communistenbond Spartacus op zondag 3 Augustus 1947’, quoted by Kool 1970, p. 626.

75 ‘De plaats van Spartacus in de Klassenstrijd’ (‘Spartacus’s place in the class-struggle’), *UEK*, special issue, December 1947.

Trotskyist or anti-fascist left-socialist positions, ultimately participating in the Dutch Resistance: Frits Kief, Barend Luteraan (leader of the 'Gorter tendency') followed this trajectory.<sup>76</sup>

In the autumn of 1947, Canne Meijer, Sijes and their partisans formed the *Groep van Radencommunisten* ('Group of Council-Communists'), which kept up political activity for some time. In spite of everything, they wanted to maintain international contacts, in particular with *Internationalisme*. In preparation for a conference that never took place, they released an international *Information and Discussion Bulletin* in November 1947, that was to have just this one issue.<sup>77</sup> After publishing two or three issues of *Radencommunisme*, the group disappeared in 1948. Canne Meijer wrote on the 1930s class-struggle in the Netherlands,<sup>78</sup> but became highly pessimistic as to the revolutionary nature of the proletariat and came to doubt the theoretical value of Marxism. B.A. Sijes devoted himself to his historical work, particularly regarding 1941's February Strike, and in the 1960s joined an 'International research committee on Nazi war criminals', which led him to testify at the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem in 1962.<sup>79</sup> Bruun van Albada, who had not followed the ex-members of the GIC in their split, ended his activity as a militant in 1948, when he was appointed director of the astronomical observatory at Bandung in Indonesia.<sup>80</sup>

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76 Frits Kief was the secretary of the official KAPN from 1930–32, then, together with the Korpers, founded the group *De Arbeidersraad*, which evolved little-by-little to Trotskyist and anti-fascist positions. During the war, Frits Kief took part in the Dutch Resistance, and became a member of the 'Labour-Party' after the war, ultimately ending up as an advocate of 'Yugoslav socialism' in the 1950s. Bram Korper and his brother Emmanuel had supported Sneevliet's RSAP in the 1930s. Barend Luteraan (1878–1970), whose responsibility in the formation of the KAPN was, in fact, greater than that of an already-sick Gorter, followed the same itinerary as Frits Kief.

77 The *Groep van Raden-Communisten* was charged with the practical preparation for this conference (bulletins). In a letter written in October 1947, *Internationalisme* made it clear that a future conference could not be organised 'on the basis of mere friendship', and should reject any 'dilettantism' in its discussions.

78 Together with Ben Sijes, in the 1950s Henk Canne Meijer wrote a study on the class-struggle in the textile-industry in Twente.

79 In the 1970s, B.A. Sijes (1908–91) contributed to a history of the extermination of the Jews and the gypsies by the Nazis, particularly in the Netherlands. See Wiesenthal and Sijes 1973; Sijes, de Graaf, Kloosterman *et alii* 1979. He also contributed to the council-communist movement in the 1960s and 1970s by writing prefaces to reprints of Pannekoek's work. His last important work was to publish Pannekoek's *Memoirs* in Amsterdam 1982. See Harmsen 1986–7.

80 Bruun van Albada (1912–72) ended his activity as a militant, but together with his wife translated Pannekoek's *Lenin as Philosopher* into Dutch.



Outside any organised militant-activity, the majority of the militants of the GIC thus ended up rejecting all revolutionary-Marxist activity. Only Theo Maassen, who stayed in the *Bond*, maintained this commitment.

## 6 The Return to the Positions of the GIC

That the split was unjustified – as Theo Maassen said – was to be demonstrated by the evolution of the *Bond* at the end of 1947, during its Christmas conference. This conference marked a decisive step in the history of the *Communistenbond Spartacus*. The organisational conception of the GIC was completely victorious and marked an abandonment of its 1945 positions on the party. This was the beginning of an evolution towards complete councilism, eventually leading to the virtual disappearance of the *Spartacusbond* in the Netherlands.

The declaration that the *Bond* would take part in all the proletariat's economic struggles led to dissolution of the organisation in the struggle. The *Bond* was no longer a critical party of the proletariat, but a body at the service of the workers' struggles: 'The *Bond* and the members of the *Bond* want to serve the class in struggle'.<sup>81</sup> Workerist theory was triumphant, and the communists of the *Bond* were merged with the masses of workers in struggle. The distinction made by Marx between communists and proletarians, and taken up by the 'Theses on the Party', disappeared: 'The *Bond* has to be an organisation of workers who think by themselves, make propaganda by themselves, go on strike by themselves, organise by themselves and administer by themselves'.

However, this evolution towards workerism was not total, and the *Bond* was still ready to declare itself an organisation with an indispensable function in the class: 'The *Bond* provides an indispensable contribution to the struggle. It is an organisation of communists conscious that the history of all society until now is the history of class-struggle, based on the development of the productive forces'. But without using the term 'party', the *Bond* declared itself for an international regroupment of revolutionary forces: 'The *Bond* considers it ... desirable that the vanguard, having the same orientation throughout the world, should regroup in an international organisation'.

The organisational measures taken at the conference were in opposition to this principle of regroupment, which could only be realised if the political and organisational centralisation of the *Bond* was maintained. In fact, the *Bond*

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81 This and the following quotes are taken from *UEK*, special issue, December 1947: 'Spartacus. Eigen werk, organisatie en propaganda'.

ceased to be a centralised organisation with statutes and executive organs. It became a federation of working-, study- and propaganda-groups. The local sections (or '*kernen*') were autonomous, without any other link than a 'working-group' focused on the relations between the local groups, and the internal bulletin *Uit eigen kring* ('From our own circle'). There were as many working-groups as there were functions to be fulfilled: editorial board, correspondence, administration, the *Bond's* publishing-house 'De Vlam', international contacts and 'economic activity' linked to the foundation of the International Federation of Factory-Nuclei (IFBK).

This return to the federalist principle of the GIC in turn brought with it a more and more councilist evolution at the political and theoretical level. 'Councilism' has two characteristics: the characterisation of the historical period since 1914 as an era of 'bourgeois revolutions' in the underdeveloped countries; and the rejection of any political organisation of revolutionaries (party-organisation). This evolution became particularly rapid in the 1950s. The affirmation of a theoretical continuity with the GIC – marked by the re-publication in 1950 of the *Fundamental principles of communist production and distribution*<sup>82</sup> – marked a break with the *Bond's* original principles of 1945.

In January 1965 was published *Daad en Gedachte* ('Act and Thought'), editorial responsibility for which lay first and foremost with Cajo Brendel, a member of the organisation since 1952. Together with Theo Maassen, he contributed greatly to the publication of pamphlets: on the East-German workers' insurrection of 1953, on the Amsterdam municipal workers' strikes of 1955, on Djilas's *The New Class*, and on the 1961 strikes in Belgium. Apart from pamphlets, the *Bond* also published theoretical essays that revealed a certain influence of the theories of *Socialisme ou Barbarie*.<sup>83</sup>

The influence of this group – with which political contacts had existed since 1953, essentially through Cajo Brendel and Theo Maassen, and whose texts were published in *Daad en Gedachte* – was no accident. The *Bond* agreed with Castoriadis' positions on 'modern capitalism' and thought that the opposition

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82 The *Principles* were written by Jan Appel in prison in the 1920s. They were revised and rearranged by Canne Meijer. According to the 1972 *Spartacusbond* preface, in 1946 Jan Appel had written, together with Canne Meijer and Sijes, *De economistische grondslagen van de radenmaatschappij* ('The Economic Foundations of Council-Society'). Appel became a member of the *Bond* during the war, until 1948. He disagreed with the refusal by ex-members of the GIC, and by the *Bond*, to direct revolutionary work towards the German army. Other reasons (personal tension with Van Albada, and a car-accident that forced him out of clandestinity) led him to abandon his work with the *Bond*.

83 The quoted pamphlets and the periodical *Daad en Gedachte* can be studied at the IISG.

of 'rulers' and 'ruled' were pertinent. The *Bond* – after the publication of Djilas's book *The New Class* – defined the Russian 'bureaucracy' as a 'new managerial class'. For the *Bond*, this class was 'new' above all because of its origins; it took the form of a 'bureaucracy' that 'forms part of the bourgeoisie'.<sup>84</sup> Nevertheless, by assimilating the latter with a layer of 'managers' who were not collective proprietors of the means of production, the *Bond* seemed to adopt Burnham's theory, which it had previously rejected at the 1947 conference. Once again, the *Bond* in 1945 had been the unconscious precursor of this theory, which it had never fully developed until this point.

This *Bond*'s slide into disaggregation had two profound causes: the rejection of all previous proletarian experience; and the abandonment by the GIC tendency – at the heart of the *Bond* – of any idea of political organisation.

After trying to understand the causes of the degeneration of the Russian Revolution, the *Bond* ceased to consider it as a 'proletarian revolution' at all, and came to see in it nothing but a 'bourgeois revolution' – just like the GIC. In a letter to Castoriadis-Chaulieu on 8 November 1953, published by the *Bond*, Pannekoek considered that this 'last bourgeois revolution' had been 'the work of the [Russian] working class'.<sup>85</sup> In effect, this rejected the 'proletarian nature of the 1917 Revolution' (workers' councils). Refusing to see a process of counter-revolution in Russia (subjection of the workers' councils to the Bolshevik state in 1918, Kronstadt in 1921), Pannekoek and the *Bond* arrived at the idea that the Russian workers had struggled for the 'bourgeois revolution', and so for their own exploitation. If 1917 was nothing to the revolutionary movement, it was quite logical for Pannekoek to assert that 'the proletarian revolution belongs to the future'. As a result, the whole history of the workers' movement ceased to appear as a source of proletarian experience, and as a point of departure for all theoretical reflection. The whole of the workers' movement, from the nineteenth century onwards, became 'bourgeois', and was situated exclusively on the terrain of the 'bourgeois revolution'.

This theoretical evolution was accompanied by an ever-greater immediatism regarding workers' strikes. The *Bond* considered that its task was to turn itself into the echo of all strikes. The class-struggle became an eternal present, without a past because there no longer was a history of the workers' movement; and without a future because the *Bond* refused to appear as an active factor able to positively influence the maturation of the workers' consciousness.

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84 Maassen 1961.

85 See Simon (ed.) 2001.

## 7 The Decline of Dutch 'Councilism'

During the discussions with *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, the *Bond* had not given up the concept of the organisation or the party. As Theo Maassen wrote: 'the vanguard is a part of the militant class, composed by the most militant workers from every political direction'. But this 'vanguard' was, in fact, a nebulous collection of groups from the revolutionary, and even from non-revolutionary milieus! This vague definition of the vanguard, dissolving the *Bond* into the ensemble of groups, was, nevertheless, a final flare-up of the original principles of 1945. Although the party appeared dangerous to it, because of 'its own independent life' and because it developed 'according to its own laws', the *Bond* still acknowledged its necessary role. It had 'to be a class-force'.<sup>86</sup>

But this 'strength of the class' would have to disappear in the workers' struggle, so as not to break 'their unity'. This boils down to saying that the party – and the organisation of the *Bond* in particular – was an invertebrate-organism, that had to 'dissolve itself in the struggle'.

This approach was the consequence of the workerist and immediatist vision of Dutch councilism. For this current, the proletariat as a whole appeared as a single political vanguard, the 'teacher' of the councilist militants, who, consequently, defined themselves as a 'rearguard'. The identification of the conscious communist and combative worker led to an identification with the immediate consciousness of the workers. The militant worker in a political organisation no longer had to elevate the level of consciousness of workers in struggle, but had to deny himself and to place himself at the level of an immediate and yet confused consciousness within the mass of the workers: '[from this] it follows that the socialist or communist of our era has to conform and identify himself with the worker in struggle'.<sup>87</sup>

This position was defended by Theo Maassen, Cajo Brendel and Jaap Meulenkamp in particular. It led – together with organisational factors – to the September 1964 split in the *Bond*. The tendency that defended the anti-organisation concept of the GIC until the last became a periodical: *Daad en Gedachte*. The way had, in fact, been paved for this disaggregation of the *Bond* by the abandonment of anything that might have symbolised the existence of a political organisation.<sup>88</sup> At the end of the 1950s, the *Communistenbond Spartacus* had

86 Quotations from a letter from Theo Maassen to 'Socialisme ou Barbarie', published in No. 18, January–March 1956, under the title 'Encore sur la question du parti'.

87 Quotes from Maassen 1961.

88 Jaap Meulenkamp (1917–98) was expelled from the *Bond* in September 1964. Cajo Brendel

become the *Spartacusbond*. The dropping of the term 'communist' meant an abandonment of a political continuity with the old 'council-communist' movement. The *Bond*'s increasingly familial atmosphere, where the word 'comrade' had been banned in favour of 'friend', no longer had anything in common with the atmosphere of a political body bringing together individuals on the basis of a common vision.

Henceforth there were two 'councilist' organisations in the Netherlands. One – the *Spartacusbond* – disappeared in August 1980, after being somewhat reanimated in the wake of 1968 and after opening itself up to international confrontation with other groups. But by opening itself up to young, impatient and very activist elements, the *Spartacusbond* gave in to the very 'leftist' temptation of participating in all 'partial struggles': the Amsterdam '*krakers*' (squatters), ecology, women's liberation.<sup>89</sup>

*Daad en Gedachte*, by contrast, went on under the form of a monthly periodical. Dominated by the strong personality of Cajo Brendel, particularly after the death of Theo Maassen in 1975, the review was sometimes the point of convergence for anarchistic elements. The *Daad en Gedachte* tendency had taken 'councilism' to its logical conclusion by rejecting the workers' movement of the nineteenth century as 'bourgeois', and by cutting itself off from every tradition, including from that of the KAPD, considered too stained by 'the spirit of the party'. Nevertheless, *Daad in Gedachte* cannot be considered an anarchist group. It was, especially due to the theoretical activity of Cajo Brendel, a Marxist group, notwithstanding its most virulently anti-Leninist ideas.

The influence of the students' contestation after 1968 has had some impact on *Daad en Gedachte*, which sometimes went onto the terrain of 'Third Worldism':

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(1915–2007) and Theo Maassen (1891–1974), along with two of their comrades – Theo van den Heuvel (1892–1976) and Rinus Wassenaar – were also excluded in December 1964. All these formed the *Daad en Gedachte* group. The exclusion was not amicable: the *Bond* recovered the machines and pamphlets belonging to it, although these latter had been written by Brendel and Maassen. See the testimony of Jaap Meulenkamp, who speaks of 'Stalinist methods': 'Brief van Jaap aan Radencommunisme', *Initiatief tot een bijeenkomst van revolutionaire groepen*, 20 January 1981. Thereafter, and despite invitations from the *Bond*, *Daad en Gedachte* refused to sit at the same table as the latter during conferences and meetings, such as that of January 1981. Other members included Bart van Burink and Gerrit de Pijper (?–1990)].

89 See the very (polemical) articles by the ICC group, in *International Review* No. 2, 1975: 'The epigones of councilism at work, 1) '*Spartacusbond*' haunted by Bolshevik phantoms, 2) Councilism to the rescue of Third-Worldism', and in No. 9, 1977: 'Break with the *Spartacusbond*', 'Is the *Spartacusbond* alone in the World?'.

... the struggles of colonial peoples have contributed something to the revolutionary movement. The fact that poorly armed peasant-populations have been able to face up to the enormous forces of modern imperialism, has shocked the myth of the invincibility of the military, technological and scientific power of the West. Their struggle has also revealed the brutality and racism of capitalism to millions of people, and has led many of them – above all among the young and the students – to engage in struggles against their own régimes.<sup>90</sup>

In this way, the workers' struggles of 1968 were understood as a by-product of 'national-liberation struggles' and identified with the struggles of young students. By giving in to the pressure of a 'leftist' student-milieu, *Daad en Gedachte*, in its March 1988 issue, ultimately expressed implicit support for the South-African nationalist ANC, by opening a public subscription for the benefit of this organisation.

Such an evolution is hardly surprising. By adopting *Socialisme ou Barbarie's* theory of a society divided not by class-antagonisms, but by revolts of the 'ruled' against the 'rulers', the 'councilist' current could only conceive of history as a succession of revolts by social categories and age-groups. The theory of the council-communists in the 1930s, then that of the *Communistenbond* in the 1950s, gave way to a kind of 'anarcho-councilism'.<sup>91</sup>

Today, council-communism in the Netherlands seems to have disappeared as a real current. It has left 'councilist' tendencies that are numerically very weak, and which have progressively attached themselves to the libertarian current.

## 8 International Council-Communists up to the 1970s

After the Second World-War, council-communism survived at the international level only through personalities like Karl Korsch and Paul Mattick in the USA,<sup>92</sup>

<sup>90</sup> Brendel 1971.

<sup>91</sup> A summary of *Daad en Gedachte's* positions can be found in the bulletin of 20 January 1981, published for a conference of various groups in which the ICC and several individuals representing only themselves also took part: 'Kanttekeningen van *Daad en Gedachte*' ('Marginal notes from *Daad en Gedachte*'). *Daad en Gedachte* took part in the conference as individuals, not as a group.

<sup>92</sup> For Paul Mattick's (1904–81) biography, and a bibliography of his political writing until his death, see the work of Frank Dingel in *1WK*, No. 3, September 1986, pp. 190–224.

and Willy Huhn and Alfred Weiland<sup>93</sup> in Germany. But on the whole, their work remained purely individual, which led them to collaborate with groups whose orientations, far from being council-communist, were close to anti-Bolshevik 'left-wing socialism' or revolutionary syndicalism.

From the aftermath of the war until the 1960s, it was difficult to discern the existence of a real international council-communist movement. In the USA, Paul Mattick proved incapable of reconstituting a political group and of publishing a periodical specific to the 'councilist' movement. But the conditions for a reception of council-communism changed in the 1940s and 1950s, and Mattick also suffered from political isolation. Whenever a certain interest in the 'council movement' develops on the American continent, as in South America, this always crystallises around individuals, as in Chile around the mining-engineer and anarchist Laín Diez, who published a Spanish translation of Pannekoek's *Lenin as Philosopher* in Santiago. Throughout the world, the ties between councilists are purely individual, maintained by means of correspondence, and easily broken in the absence of an international organisation.<sup>94</sup>

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93 Alfred Weiland (1906–78) was the son of a Spartakist. In 1920, he joined the *Freie Sozialistische Jugend*, the KPD's youth-organisation; the latter became the 'Communist Workers' Youth' (KAJ) when it split from the KPD (October 1920), with around 4,000 young workers. Influenced by Rühle's pedagogical theories. From August to December 1925, he took a membership-card for the Nazi Party in Berlin, and not until the 1960s did he give any clear explanations about this mysterious episode of his life. From 1926, he held positions in the Berlin AAU and in the KAPD (in charge of international contacts; secretary of the Berlin organisation from 1929 to 1931; member of the KAPD GHA), then in the KAU. Working in Berlin, in a telegraph-lines factory, he was a militant in the unemployed-movement, and then held by the Gestapo from 1933 to 1935. He managed to take part in the council-communist conference in Copenhagen in 1935, and wrote its final resolutions. Despite remaining under police-surveillance until 1938, he managed to continue some activity with communist workers' groups. After May 1945, he published the KAU bulletin *Zur Information*, then the review *Neues Beginnen* together with some former *Unionen*-militants (Fritz Parlow, Willy Raukittis, Ernst Pönisch, Otto Reimers, and so on), and left-socialists, in West Berlin. Here, he was 'kidnapped' by the Russian political police on 11 November 1950, and condemned as a 'counter-revolutionary' by an East-Berlin court. Thanks to a 'campaign', led by Margarete Buber-Neumann (1901–1989), he was released in November 1958. Hostile to Brandt's political openness to the East, and becoming more and more anti-Communist, in 1971 he founded a 'Democratic Centre' in West Berlin. He sold his important library to the Free University of Berlin. See *Die Sonde* 1950; and S. Kubina 1995.

94 Also *The Western Socialist*, *Politics, Left, Partisan Review*, and so on, Mattick contributed

More realistic was the appearance, in Australia in 1944, of a periodical laying claim to council-communism: Melbourne's *Southern Advocate for Workers' Councils* (*An International Digest*). This monthly periodical that survived until 1949 published *Lenin as Philosopher* and *The Workers' Councils* in 1948, in cooperation with Pannekoek, and so made known the work of the Dutch theoretician. The group was animated by James Arthur Dawson (1889–1958), supported by the anarchist intellectual Kenneth Joseph Kenafick (1904–82). Dawson, born in Melbourne, was the son of a Methodist pastor and notably influenced a milieu of German immigrants. But politically the group was an eclectic mixture of revolutionary syndicalism (through its close ties with the American rww), anarchism and 'councilism'. It considered itself not as a group but as a 'letter-box' for all currents to the left of Stalinism and social democracy. It made known in Australia the existence of the Dutch *Communistenbond* as well as that of the 'Bordigist' current. Due to the lack of an organised political framework this Australian periodical disappeared in 1949 without leaving any successors.<sup>95</sup>

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frequently to anarchist, socialist (World Socialist Party, USA) and councilist periodicals in the USA, Britain, France, Scandinavia, Germany, Italy, Australia, and Chile.

The Chilean Laín Diez Kaiser (1895–1980), who was the chief of the state's department for mining in Santiago in the 1940s, was an anarcho-syndicalist who wrote about the 'example and lessons' of Pierre Monatte. (See Jorge Budrovich-Saez, *Después del Marxismo, después del Anarquismo: Laín Diez y la crítica social no dogmática*, in *Revista Pléyade*, Valparaíso, Nr. 15, January-June 2015, pp. 157–78). He was also one of the animators of the famous literary and leftist monthly periodical *Babel* (1921–51, Buenos Aires, then Santiago), which published some texts by Paul Mattick. This periodical was led by Samuel Glusberg, known as Enrique Espinoza (1898–1987), born in Kishinev, Russia: he settled in Argentina in 1905, then lived in Chile, visited Trotsky in exile, and was a contributor to the Mexican Trotskyist periodical *Clave*.

- 95 The March 1948 issue (No. 43) of the Melbourne *Southern Advocate for Workers' Councils* (previously the *Southern Socialist International Digest*) published articles from *Battaglia comunista* (the *Partito Comunista Internazionale*), and from *Internationalisme*, the organ of the *Gauche communiste de France*, as well as an article from *Le Libertaire*, a French anarchist publication. For the political trajectory of Dawson, see Wright 1980. During the First World-War, Dawson had joined an rww club – the Detroit rww tendency linked to the DeLeonist (Daniel de Leon) Socialist Labor Party in the USA. For two years, he edited the *One Big Union Herald* for the Workers' International Industrial Union. In the early 1940s, he set up the Workers' Literature Bureau to counter the flood of Stalinist material, mainly with material by the Socialist Party of Great Britain, and the Australian Socialist Party. Dawson moved progressively closer to a council-communist position, typified by the publication of Pannekoek's *Workers Councils*. Paul Mattick put Pannekoek in touch with him, and *Workers' Councils* was finally serialised in *Southern Advocate for Workers' Councils* in 1948–9.



The evolution of the ex-members of 'councilism' in Germany, which was its cradle, is particularly significant.

At the end of the war, some council-communist militants in Germany were not able to take on revolutionary political independence. Some circles, such as those of Alfred Weiland and Peter Utzelmann, preferred to have contact in 1942–4 with the local KPD Resistance in Berlin, like Anton Saefkow's group, and probably also the Goerdeler Circle, opponents – together with Canaris – of Hitler from within the Nazi state-apparatus.

In May 1945, a circle of former militants of the KAU was formed in occupied Berlin, publishing illegal circular-letters: *Zur Information*, the organisation's organ. Very soon afterwards, in 1946, the circle decided to 'not be isolated from the working masses'. Its militants (around 150) joined the SPD and the SED, developing a policy of 'entryism', in absence of any 'independent revolutionary movement'. Later, the circle became the Groups of International Socialists (GIS), with Weiland's house becoming the central point for the discussions between militants from West and East Germany. All contact with the Trotskyist group of Oskar Hippe (1900–90) in Berlin failed.

Most of them worked in the apparatus of the SED, and were under Russian and Stasi secret-police surveillance. Some of them became police-informants. All these circles were under the surveillance of the Western and Eastern intelligence-agencies.

In fact, with Germany's division in two, the old councilist currents evolved separately.

In East Germany, in particular in Saxony, the old members of the group *Proletarischer Zeitgeist* ('The Proletarian Spirit') – who had published the periodical with the same name from 1922 until 1933 under the influence of the AAU-E – regrouped. Their centre was in Zwickau and they kept up contacts with the Western zone (Hamburg and Mühlheim an der Ruhr). But this former *Unionen*-tendency did not hesitate to merge with the anarcho-syndicalist and anarchist remainders of the former FAU. Here, the 'unionism' of the AAU-E led directly to anarcho-syndicalism, at least until 1926, when this organisation broke with the FAUD. Initially strong in Saxony, from 1948 onwards they were decimated by the political police of the Russian zone. One principal leader, Willi Jelinek (1890–1952), delegate from Western Saxony to the Second Congress of the KAPD in 1920, then member of the AAU-E and editor of *Proletarischer Zeitgeist*, died in prison (Bautzen) on 24 March 1952, in very suspicious circumstances.<sup>96</sup>

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96 See: Bock 1976, pp. 173–85, concerning the left-councilist/socialist current for the period 1945–50, and Andreas Graf / Knut Bergbauer, *Direkte Aktion*, no. 157, 2003, 'Genossen, den

In the Western zone, and more specifically in West Berlin, after 1946–7 it is impossible to speak of the existence of a true independent ‘council-communist’ current, but rather of a ‘left-socialist’ current with councilist sympathies. In the conditions of the Cold War, there no longer remained any independent political tradition of the KAPD. After the war, as said above, the majority of the old members of the council-communist current (KAU, *Rote Kämpfer*) joined the left wing of the SPD or the SED-KPD, with contact – for some of them – with Western and Eastern secret agencies. In the Eastern zone, after 1948–50 the SED purged the former members of the KAPD/AAU, who experienced the ‘socialist prisons’ of East Germany.

Weiland’s circle – the GIS – published in 1947 the periodical *Neues Beginnen, Blätter internationaler Sozialisten* (‘Beginning Anew, International Socialist Papers’) in Berlin from May 1947 until 1954, with a circulation of 2,000 copies. Karl Schröder’s circle in East Berlin refused to join. This periodical, which Alfred Weiland and Fritz Parlow worked for, laid claim to the positions of council-communism. The circle also reconstituted the former swv (*Sozialwissenschaftliche Vereinigung*), active between 1923 and 1932, built by Paul Levi and Karl Schröder, which after 1947 tried to bring the German ‘left-socialists’ together in discussion.

They had links with the Dutch *Communistenbond* and published articles by Pannekoek, who contributed from time to time.<sup>97</sup> In fact Pannekoek indirectly supported a tendency whose violent anti-Bolshevism, in the period of the Cold War, was a barely concealed defence of the American bloc.<sup>98</sup> His criticism of the

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*Weg weisen müssen wir. Antiautoritäre Arbeiterbewegung in der SBZ: Wilhelm “Willi” Jelinek und der Zwickauer Kreis’.*

- 97 Extracts of Pannekoek’s correspondence in *Neues Beginnen*, without any mention of the author. He published articles under the pseudonyms of Karl Horner and John Harper, as well as publishing under his real name in *Funken* ‘Über Arbeiterräte’ (No. 1, 1952). ‘Die Arbeit unter dem Sozialismus’ (November 1952) ‘Arbeit und Masse’ (May 1955). Although in the February 1950 issue, Pannekoek criticised the Trotskyists’ ‘usurpation’ of the IKD label (that of the Bremen-left radicals of 1918). He said nothing about the ‘left-socialist’ orientation and activity of the members of the *Neues Beginnen*’ and *Funken*’ circles within German Social Democracy. On the contrary, he considered that the views of *Neues Beginnen* were ‘in general’ correct (letter from Pannekoek to Weiland, 9 May 1950, quoted by Bock 1976, p. 176).
- 98 Ihlau 1971, p. 143, claims that members of *Neues Beginnen* were subsidised by the Americans during the 1948 Berlin Blockade, in order to make it an instrument of ‘anti-Bolshevik’ propaganda. For this reason, the ex-members of *Rote Kämpfer* ceased any joint work. This claim seems to have been true. At the height of the Cold War, the Americans frequently offered subsidies to periodicals that stood to the left of Stalinism and Trotskyism. Julián

SPD – to which a good many of these ‘international socialists’ belonged! – could not hide an outspoken left-socialist orientation, which in the final analysis was a pro-Western one. The July 1949 issue declared: ‘A spectre haunts the world, the spectre of the fifth column of Bolshevism ...’ The February 1950 issue was full of praise for the British Labour government, whose ‘silent revolution, full of consequences for world-socialism and for liberty’ was ‘incomparably more revolutionary than the revolution of October 1917’.<sup>99</sup>

In fact, there were a multitude of small ‘anti-bureaucratic’ and ‘anti-authoritarian’ groups, whose members worked within social democracy and claimed continuity with the council-communism of Otto Rühle. This was the case with the ‘Thomas Münzer circle’ from Stuttgart, whose fusion with *Neues Beginnen* from Berlin in 1950 created the *Funken* group, who published a periodical of the same name until 1959: *Funken, Aussprachshefte für internationale sozialistische Politik*. In 1949, in the midst of the Cold War, there appeared the periodical *Pro und Contra*, with the subtitle: ‘Neither East nor West. For one single socialist world’. But all these periodicals contained violent anti-Russian diatribes. And there is no doubt that they were used as instruments of propaganda by the Allied authorities, while some former KAPists chose to defend the ‘new socialist régime’ in the East. There were some, like Alfred Weiland, who believed rightly that an anti-Russian periodical like *Pro und Contra* was infiltrated by the Russian NKVD for the purpose of provocation.<sup>100</sup> People like Willy Huhn and Henry Jacoby,<sup>101</sup> who wrote for these periodicals, could well lay claim to con-

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Gorkin, previously a leader of the POUM, was at the time an instrument of this policy, under the cover of the left wing of the Comintern. According to Marc Chirik, former leader of this group, a similar offer was once made to the French communist left (*Internationalisme*) by Julián Gorkin around 1949–52. The GCF shrugged off this offer (interview by the author in the 1980s).

99 ‘Die Soziale Revolution und die Sozialisten’, *Neues Beginnen*, No. 2, February 1950.

100 This claim is made in a letter to Pannekoek (Pannekoek Archives, map 99/41) by Weiland, who was already being watched by the Russian political police. *Pro und Contra*, edited by Willy Huhn and others, was violently anti-Russian. It called for the ‘renovation of social democracy’ and supported Tito’s Yugoslav experiment. It fell under Trotskyist influence (Ernest Mandel) from 1951 onwards. The same pro-Western tone is to be found in *Funken*, which in its October 1950 issue denounced ‘the Bolshevik peril’, and called for a united front of anti-fascists and democrats.

101 Willy Huhn (1909–70) was a member of the SPD in 1929, then of the SAP in 1931. He joined the *Rote Kämpfer* (the splitting SAP’s underground-fraction). Despite brief periods of imprisonment, he remained a member of the RK from 1933–5. From 1950–52, he was an editor of the periodical *Pro und contra*. He was a member of the SPD, and taught at the August Bebel Institute in West Berlin, but was excluded in 1953 for his articles revealing

tinuity with Otto Rühle, but their orientation was in fact not internationalist ('Neither East nor West'), but pro-Western. Ultimately, they were regroupments of opponents inside Western social democracy, whose ideological cover was anti-authoritarian and 'anti-bureaucratic councilism'.

In the 1950s, particularly after the kidnapping of Weiland in West Berlin by the Russian secret police (NKVD) on 11 November 1950, the influence of the old council-communism decreased.

In fact, it was outside Germany that the 'councilist' movement was to develop internationally. This development was less in continuity with the council-communism of the 1920s and 1930s, than it was under influence of Castoriadis's group *Socialisme ou Barbarie*.<sup>102</sup> This group originated in Trotskyism, which it had broken with in 1949, and was characterised by its definition of the USSR as a 'bureaucratic capitalism' that had engendered a 'new class': the bureaucracy. According to this view, a 'modern capitalism' was developing, whose internal contradiction was no longer the class-struggle, but the opposition between 'rulers' and 'ruled'. From this point of departure, *Socialisme ou Bar-*

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the SPD's true history. From then on, he worked with *Funken, Von unten auf*, and so on. (See the biography of Huhn by Christian Riecherts in Huhn 1981, pp. 115–18.) From a 'councilist' point of view he criticised the German Social Democracy from Lassalle to Kautsky: see Huhn 2001.

Henry Jacoby (1905–86), anarchist-pacifist, came into contact with Otto Rühle, whose friend he became, during the mid-1920s. In 1933, he was a member of the *Funken* group, founded by Kurt Landau, and was imprisoned from 1934–6. In exile in Prague, then Paris, Montauban, while remaining a member of the *Funken* group, which adhered to the left-socialist 'London Bureau'. In 1941 he sought refuge in the USA, and worked for Marcuse's and Horkheimer's Institute for Social Research, which in 1943 worked for the Allies. After the war, he worked for the UN and became Director of the FAO's General Section in Geneva. Like Willy Huhn, he contributed to the Berlin *Funken* circle. Under the pseudonym of Sebastian Franck, he published works and studies by Rühle, as well as his memoirs and a study on 'The Bureaucratisation of the World'. See: *IWK* No. 3. September 1986: biography and bibliography of Jacoby's works by I. Herbst and B. Klemm, pp. 388–95.

- 102 Claude Lefort ('Montal') and Cornelius Castoriadis came from the Trotskyist movement (*Parti communiste internationaliste*). During the mid-1960s, they abandoned Marxism to become well-known 'political thinkers' and 'philosophers'. Castoriadis (pseudonyms: Chaulieu; Cardan; Coudray) ended his political evolution as a defender of 'Western democracy' against the 'stratocratic peril' incorporated by the 'Russian totalitarianism', in his book *Devant la guerre* (see Castoriadis 1981). His articles in *Socialisme ou Barbarie* have been reprinted in the '10/18' series, Paris, UGE, from 1973–9. Before his death in December 1997, he was a philosopher of 'autonomous thought' and a psycho-analyst. See Gottraux 1997: in this book readers will find useful sections on the influence of council communism on the Castoriadis group, in the 1950s and 1960s. See also Van der Linden 1997.

*barie* claimed that it was 'going beyond Marxism', and that the proletariat had been 'integrated into consumer-society'. The revolutionary movement ceased to be political and had to be a 'total movement', inserting itself into everyday life. This vision, which one can describe as a 'modernist' theory – namely, a theory of 'modern capitalism' – shared with classical 'councilism' a rejection of the political and trade-union 'apparatuses' of the 'old workers' movement' and the rejection of the Russian Revolution and Bolshevism as 'bourgeois'.

While *Socialisme ou Barbarie* disappeared in 1967, having proclaimed that the revolution was 'impossible' in the Marxist sense – except in the form of 'revolts of the people' at the level of everyday life – it has had a striking influence outside France. The British group *Solidarity*, which published a periodical of the same name from 1961 on, was formed on the basis of the theories of Castoriadis.<sup>103</sup> Like SouB, it paraded a strong anti-Bolshevism and an attraction to 'things of everyday life' (sexuality, nuclear armament, housing, women's liberation). Like SouB it declared its support for 'national-liberation struggles', which was never the case with the old council-communism. Between 1968 and 1973, *Solidarity* served as a bridge between anti-bureaucratic 'modernism' and the councilism that was developing in a multitude of small groups in several countries, in Europe as well as in the United States.

Following 1968, a number of groups claimed continuity with council-communism. In France, the most important was *Informations et Correspondance Ouvrières* (ICO; 'Workers' News and Correspondence'), which came into existence in 1960 and was animated by Henri Simon and former members of SouB.<sup>104</sup> It had a considerable influence between 1968 and 1971, before disap-

103 The London 'Solidarity' group (with which several 'autonomous' groups later amalgamated) came from the 'Socialism Reaffirmed' group, formed in 1960. From 1961, it was well-known for its participation in the 'Committee of 100' against nuclear weapons (see: *Autogestion et socialisme*, No. 24–25, September–December 1973 and 'The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control 1917–21' by Maurice Brinton, with a foreword on Solidarity). Maurice Brinton (1923–2005), the leading figure of the Solidarity group, was the pen-name of the British neurologist Chris Pallis. He translated much French-language material and wrote vivid first-hand accounts of mass-struggles such as May '68 in France.

104 For the trajectory of ICO (whose origins are in *Informations et Liaisons Ouvrières* (ILO), a split from *Socialisme ou Barbarie* in 1958), see Henri Simon's October 1973 pamphlet *ICO, un point de vue*. Henri Simon passed a severe judgement on the activity of ICO, which he left in 1973:

'What was happening in struggles and in the factories was abandoned (because it was "boring" always hearing the same thing), in favour of debates on their individual preoccupations (which, moreover, were much limited by the fact that most belonged to the marginal or student-milieu); this idealism was accompanied by activities driven in

pearing in 1973. In the period following May 1968, it was the largest councilist group in France. Like the British group Solidarity, it tried to create an amalgam of SouB's theories and those of the old council-communism. At the time, a multitude of other groups formed a veritable 'councilist' political milieu.<sup>105</sup>

Outside France and Great Britain, the echo of 'councilism' following May '68 was more limited. Outside Europe, we should not ignore Paul Mattick Jr.'s American group *Root and Branch* in Boston, close to ICO.<sup>106</sup> Like all the councilist groups, it proved ephemeral and disappeared in the mid-1970s. By contrast, in Scandinavia, above all in Sweden, 'councilism' found fertile ground at the beginning of the 1970s. In Sweden several groups emerged, of which *Internationell Arbetarkamp* (International Workers' Struggle) and *Förbundet Arbetarmakt* (United Workers' Power) were the most important.<sup>107</sup> Both emerged in

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every direction by the whim of events ... As for material tasks, the right was declared for anyone to say and do whatever they liked in meetings at any moment: all methodical discussion, any pre-planned agenda, was considered an odious repression' (p. 8).

This account gives an idea of the 'atmosphere' in some 'councilist' groups post-'68, situated between marginalisation and 'lifestyle'-activism and 'anti-authoritarianism'. Henri Simon later went on to create the small group *Echanges et Mouvement*, which publishes the bulletin *Echanges*.

105 May '68 was rich with every kind of 'councilist' – or semi-'councilist' – group: *Pouvoir Ouvrier*; *La Vieille Taupe*, led by Jean Barrot (Gilles Dauvé) and Pierre Guillaume, the latter becoming a protagonist of the 'negationist theory' in the 1980s, denying the existence of Hitler's gas-chambers and the Shoah, and soon turning towards the far right; the *Groupe de Liaison pour l'Autonomie des Travailleurs* (GLAT); the *Cahiers du communisme de conseils* in Marseilles; the *Organisation conseilliste de Clermont-Ferrand*; *Pouvoir international des conseils ouvriers* (PICO), and so on. Under the influence of *Révolution Internationale*, which was originally council-communist and close to the ICO in 1968–70, and its leader Marc Chirik – a Trotskyist and ex-Bordigist militant, who returned from Venezuela to France in 1968 –, these last two groups ultimately fused with it (in 1972), forming an international group (the ICC) in 1975. This current increasingly became a sectarian hybrid of Bolshevism-Leninism, and Bordigism, leading regular crusades against 'parasitism', namely, other political groups of the same tendency (see its 'Theses on parasitism', *International Review*, No. 94, London, 1998).

106 See Brecher *et alii*, 1975.

107 The *International Arbetarkamp* came out of the *Manifestgruppen* (a split from Maoism) in 1973. It joined in association with Barrot's periodical *Le Mouvement communiste*, the Swedish/Danish group *Kommunismen* (a 1971 split from Scandinavian Bordigism, actively led by Carsten Juhl), and Jacques Camatte's group 'Invariance' (a split from the Bordigist PCI in 1967). These groups thus formed an international 'modernist' movement, whose theory emphasised the 'negation of the proletariat' and of economic struggles. In Scandinavia, a more influential group was *Arbetarmakt* (or FAM), founded in 1972 – to disappear

about 1972–3; the former rapidly disappeared, while the latter survived until 1977. Laying claim to the ‘modernism’ of SouB and Solidarity, they were the protagonists of this current in Scandinavia. But their translations have also made known the basic texts of 1930s council-communism, including texts by Pannekoek and Gorter.<sup>108</sup> The teachings of Paul Mattick Sr. in 1975–6 at the University of Roskilde in Denmark had a real impact on the propagation of councilist theories in the ‘anti-authoritarian’ milieu in Scandinavia.<sup>109</sup> Outside Scandinavia, in countries like Germany and Italy, the influence of council-

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at the end of the 1970s – which brought together as many as a hundred members. This group was a mixture of ‘leftist’ and ‘anti-imperialist’ (Vietnam-related) activism in its practice, and ‘councilism’ in its theory: for its positions, see its platform, *Politisk plattform, uppgifter, stadgar Förbundet Arbetarmakt*, September 1973.

- 108 The *Internationell Arbetarkamp* translated the GIC’s *Theses on Bolshevism* into Swedish (No. 3, May 1973), as well as Pannekoek’s 1934 text *The intelligentsia in the class-struggle* (pamphlet published in September 1973). *Arbetarmakt* published in Swedish the *Theses on Bolshevism* (1975), Pannekoek’s *Lenin as Philosopher* (pamphlet No. 3), Gorter’s *Open letter to comrade Lenin* (pamphlet No. 10), along with texts by Cardan, Rosa Luxemburg, and Rossana Rossanda (of the Italian *Il Manifesto* group). They also translated texts from the KAPD and the AAU, with studies on the KAPD, heavily influenced by Bock 1976 (pamphlet No. 11, *Arbetarråde*, the theoretical review *Råds Makt* No. 8, 1975, ‘Vänsterkommunismen i Tyskland’). *Arbetarmakt* was also influenced by Harald Andersen-Harild, an old council-communist from the Danish GIK of the 1930s, and in 1976 republished the first issue of *Mod Strømen* (from December 1930). For its part, the *Kommunismen* group – led by Carsten Juhl, today associate-professor at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts – republished in German texts by the KAPD (‘Partei und Klasse’, in *Verlag Kommunismen*), by Gorter (‘Die Kommunistische Arbeiter-Internationale’), in 1972; Pannekoek’s 1909 text ‘Tactical disagreements in the workers’ movement’ was republished in 1974. In 1971, *Kommunismen* published in French an important pamphlet: *La Gauche allemande et la question syndicale dans la III<sup>e</sup> Internationale*.

- 109 Coming from the author of *Marx and Keynes*, Mattick’s crisis-theory influenced the whole ‘councilist’ milieu, in Scandinavia, Britain, and so on. As a disciple of Grossmann, he considered that the crises of capital could be explained entirely by the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, the ‘saturation of markets’ having no part to play in explaining them. Mattick’s influence in Scandinavia seems to have promoted an essentially academic study of Marx’s *Capital*. Most of the Scandinavian councilist groups spread the idea of the study of *Kapitallogik* (Capital’s Logic), such as the Swedish periodical *Tekla* (1977–84). Under Mattick’s influence, they saw themselves as academic study-groups, rather than groups for ‘political intervention’. As for Mattick himself, his view of future revolutionary perspectives, at the end of the 1970s, moved between pessimism and optimism:

‘The future remains open ... Marxists necessarily start from the principle that the road to socialism is not cut, and that there remains a chance to overthrow capitalism before it self-destructs ... And yet, after more than a hundred years of socialist agitation, the hope

communism, and of Mattick in particular, made itself felt at the 'literary' level through the re-publication of old texts. In Germany after 1968, the councilist current has barely crystallised in groups, with the notable exception of the group *Die soziale Revolution ist keine Parteisache!* ('The social revolution is not a party-affair!') in 1971.<sup>110</sup> The same is true of Italy, where 'councilism' in the strict sense of the term emerged on the fringes of the 'workers' autonomy' (*autonomia operaia*) movement at the end of the seventies.<sup>111</sup>

In the period after 1968, and until the mid-1970s, 'councilism' played the role of an antechamber. Certain groups have disengaged from it and have evolved towards the positions of the so-called 'ultra-left', by appropriating the political and theoretical experience of the communist left of the 1920s and 1930s in Germany and Italy, and in France around *Bilan*.<sup>112</sup> The other groups

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seems slender indeed. What one generation has learned, the next forgets, led as it is by forces outside its control and therefore beyond its understanding' (Mattick 1983, p. 30; text from 1979).

- 110 This West-Berlin group published only two issues in 1971: there were numerous contributions from such groups as *Daad en Gedachte*, Solidarity, Root and Branch, ICO, and *Révolution Internationale*, along with texts by Mattick. Other periodicals like *Politikon*, *Revolte*, *Schwarze Protokolle*, born at the same moment, oscillated between anarchism, situationism, and 'councilism', in the wake of the student-revolt.
- 111 Council-communist ideas found a more favourable terrain with the decomposition of the Italian 'Bordigist' movement and the rejection of all forms of Leninism after the Polish strikes at the beginning of the 1980s. This found expression in numerous translations of Mattick, Pannekoek, Rühle, and so on.
- 112 This was the case with a number of the groups that formed sections of the International Communist Current (ICC), founded in 1975. In 1972, after abandoning their 'councilist' positions, the Marseilles group *Cahiers du communisme de conseils* (Robert Camoin) and the *Organisation conseilliste de Clermont-Ferrand* (Guy Sabatier) merged with the *Révolution Internationale* group, since 1975 the ICC's section in France. After breaking with 'councilism', the British *World Revolution* group, which had emerged from Solidarity, became the ICC's section in Britain. The same happened in Sweden, where a nucleus from the *För Kommunismen* group (1975–7) – which came from the CP in Stockholm – joined with some elements from *Arbetarmakt* to form *Internationell Revolution*, the ICC's section in Sweden. The same was true of the ICC's section in the Netherlands, whose members came from the 'councils' milieu. Another of today's currents, closer to the tradition of 'Bordigism', is the British Communist Workers' Organisation, which was originally a Scottish 'councils' group that came from Solidarity. Formed in 1974, at the beginning of the 1980s the CWO was associated with the Italian *Battaglia Comunista* group, which had split in 1952 with Bordiga's International Communist Party (ICP). In every case, the break with 'councilism' was made possible by the personality of Marc Chirik, the former Trotskyist then Bordigist militant, charismatic leader of the ICC, who remained always under the influence of Leninist con-



disappeared after attempting what was, more-or-less, a synthesis of council-communism, 'situationism', 'postmodernism' and 'left-wing communism'.<sup>113</sup>

If 'councilism' as an organised current has disappeared today, this is to be explained as much by the fragility of its basis in the 1960s and 1970s ('the student-revolt'; 'anti-bureaucratism' and 'anti-authoritarianism') as by its negation of all organised activity. The councilist milieu has been less a milieu of structured groups with coherent positions – like those of council-communism in the 1930s – than a nebulous cloud. This 'cloud' brought together the remnants of the *Socialisme ou Barbarie* current and the Situationists.<sup>114</sup>

Today, with the disappearance of the Dutch and German communist left, there are almost no groups left that have any continuity with the old council-communism. Rather, there exists a current of 'councilist' ideas that manifests itself in the majority of European countries to a greater or lesser extent, which can appear ephemerally through episodic periodicals or circles, but never in an organised and theoretically coherent way. Born in reaction to the Leninism and Bolshevism of the communist parties and the 'leftist' groups (Maoists and Trotskyists), 'councilism' is a politically unorganised and theoretically informal current. Its basis is, above all, the rejection of 'substitutionism' and of all forms of organisation, in the same way as the old anarchist current. As such, it cannot have 'formal' and 'organised' expressions, but remains at the mercy of events in society. As a 'spontaneous' current, its expressions are spontaneous and ephemeral. From this point of view, it can express the revolt of the intellectual layers of the petty bourgeoisie, against all bureaucracy, as was the case after 1968. But such a revolt appears and rises spontaneously from the momentary event.

Nevertheless through its 'anti-Leninism' and its critique of all 'apparatuses', councilism also crystallised, from about 1968 to 1975, the rejection of the official trades-unions and of parliamentarism by significant numbers of radicalised workers. Above all, it has expressed the mistrust of minorities of workers with

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ceptions. See the biographical annex in Bourrinet 1999 and on the site left-dis.nl: <http://www.left-dis.nl/f/chirik.pdf>.

113 The list of these groups is not short. In France, we can mention, among many others, the groups *Mouvement communiste* (Jean Barrot's group) and *Négation* around 1975; in Scandinavia, the groups already cited, *Kommunismen* and *Internationell Arbetarkamp*; in Portugal after 1975, *Combate*, and so on.

114 Although they sprang from a different tradition, the Situationist groups were the first, prior to 1968, to rediscover council-communism. See René Riésel, 'Preliminaries on Councils and Councilist Organization', in *Internationale Situationniste*, No. 12, 1969. Translation appears in Knabb (ed.) 1995.

regard to any political organisation, seen as 'deadly' in itself. In this sense, 'councilism' appears more as a spontaneous reaction of these minorities during important social struggles. As an immediate reaction, it cannot be a structured current, but is rather a nebulous movement, whose shape is difficult to grasp; a mixture of both 'spirit of revolt' at the level of everyday life and 'contestation' of all organisation at the political level.

But, as political current, it is attached without any doubt to the left-communism of the 1920s, which fought in an organised form the politics of the social-democratic and Leninist currents: a new 'revolutionary movement' emerged on radically new bases, the fight for autonomous workers' councils and a new society free of any alleged 'workers' state' or party-dictatorship.

## Conclusion

This history of the German-Dutch left has tried to fill an important gap in the history of the revolutionary workers' movement in Europe. While the history of Germany and of its social movements in the twentieth century is fairly well-known through works in French and English, this is not true of the Netherlands. Generally seen as a third-ranking power – perhaps, above all, because the Dutch language is not widely known – the recent history of the Netherlands has largely remained *terra incognita*. And that is not even to mention the history of its workers' movement, at a time when, as Jean-Louis Robert emphasised, 'we are seeing a decline in "pure" political history and particularly in the study of the workers' movement'.<sup>1</sup>

Our research has been guided by a personal interest in the little-known history of the left-communist movement at the time of the Third International. We were particularly stimulated by the meetings and discussions we had with old militants of the German-Dutch left like Jan Appel, B.A. Sijes, Stan Poppe, and particularly Cajo Brendel.

But this interest in the German and Dutch communist left has an objective basis. This current was an essential element in the left-wing reaction against the 'opportunist' and 'reformist' degeneration of the Second International. At the theoretical level, the names of Luxemburg and Pannekoek are inextricably linked, both through the close connections between the German and Dutch lefts, and through the coherence of their revolutionary Marxist vision, which converged in the same critique of Kautsky's 'centrism'. The theoretical roots of the Third International are to be found as much in the left-current of Pannekoek and Luxemburg as in Lenin's Bolshevik current. For all these reasons, the German-Dutch left can only be understood in the context of a global, international history of the Marxist left before and after 1914.

It was the praxis of wide layers of the German proletariat in particular, but also the simultaneous praxis of the international proletariat in the wake of the Russian Revolution, which gave life to the left-communist current on the social level, rather than just a theoretical one. Like Bordiga's Communist Party of Italy, which Lenin qualified as 'leftist', the German KAPD – influenced as much by Luxemburg as by Gorter and Pannekoek – brought together tens of thousands of workers. Through the *Unionen* (AAU), the KAPD influenced and acted on the anti-parliamentary and anti-trade-union responses of hundreds of thousands

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1 *Le Mouvement social*, No. 142, Paris, 1988.

of revolutionary workers. In the Netherlands, the influence of the communist left was more theoretical than practical.

The reduction of left-communism to the level of small groups after 1922 in no way diminishes the interest of this current:

- The history of the workers' movement cannot be reduced to the history of the 'winners' (the social democrats or the Stalinists). In 1919, it was not inevitable that left-communism would be defeated. The history of the workers' movement, like the history of humanity in general, is not fated in advance. The defeat of the world-revolution in Germany, and the consequent isolation and degeneration of the Russian Revolution and the Comintern, were the essential cause of the defeat of left-communism.
- The numerical weakness of a current in the revolutionary movement is neither a necessary nor a sufficient reason for placing it in a historical curiosity-shop. The numerical decline of the Bolsheviks between 1914 and 1917, when the party had only 2,000–5,000 militants, did not prevent it from having a growing influence among the Russian proletariat in 1917.
- In fact, the political and theoretical positions of a revolutionary organisation are what really count. It would be wrong to reduce them to a mere chapter or even a paragraph in the general history of political ideas. In certain historical and social conditions, 'ideas' become a material force that 'seizes hold of the masses', as Marx wrote.

The history of the Dutch and German communist left appears to present itself as a series of rejections:

- rejection of opportunism and reformism within the Second International, as a strategy for the parliamentary and trade-union integration of the proletariat into the state;
- rejection of the strategy of the 'peaceful conquest' of the state in the name of a 'Western', 'democratic' path for the 'developed proletariat'; thus, rejection of any 'gradual' evolution towards socialism;
- rejection of all nationalism and all national ideology within the proletariat, and consequently, rejection of 'progressive' national wars and of the world-war during the first Great War;
- rejection of the trade-union and parliamentary tactics, of the 'united front' and support for 'national-liberation movements' advocated by Lenin and the Third International with the aim of more rapidly 'conquering' the masses for the revolution;
- rejection of the big mass-parties on the model of the Second International,

and thus rejection of the attempts to form mass-communist parties by fusing with the 'centrist' currents of social democracy;

- rejection of any party-dictatorship over the working class after the seizure of power; rejection of the dictatorship of the communist party over the workers' councils or of seeing the latter as mere transmission-belts for the party; rejection of substitutionism, which sees the communist party as the general staff and the proletariat as a passive mass blindly submitting to the orders of this general staff;
- rejection of state-capitalism as a 'socialist transition' to communism;
- rejection of Stalinist barbarism and of Russian state-capitalism; consequently, rejection of the 'defence of the USSR' in the name of the 'progressive' character of the 'degenerated workers' state'; rejection of the Trotskyist political analysis of the USSR;
- rejection of anti-fascist ideology as an ideology of a united front with the left wing of the bourgeoisie and as a strategy for derailing the class-struggle;
- rejection of popular fronts as decisive moments in the ideological defeat of the proletariat and in its integration into the preparations of the 'democratic states' for generalised war;
- rejection of any support for the Spanish Republican state during the Civil War and the call for its overthrow by the proletariat; rejection of the conceptions and practices of anarchism in Spain, as a form of collaboration with the Republican state and an inevitable path to the defeat and crushing of the Spanish workers;
- rejection of any participation in the Second World-War in the name of the defence of 'democracy' against fascism; proclamation of 'revolutionary defeatism' in both camps and the rejection of any participation in the Resistance, which was denounced as a 'military instrument of the imperialist war'.

This long – and impressive – series of rejections is not unique to the Dutch left and its international counterparts. The same rejection can also be seen in the Bordigist current organised in the Italian Fraction around *Bilan* in the 1930s. The position of these small groups can be summarised by the title of a series of articles in *Bilan* in 1936: 'The watchword of the day: don't betray!' These groups had made a conscious choice, despite their growing isolation, not to betray their original internationalist positions.

The left-communist current cannot, however, be defined only as a series of rejections. It was, above all, the affirmation of a new strategy and tactic for the workers' movement in the epoch of imperialism. This new epoch, that of the 'decadence of capitalism', had profoundly modified the workers' movement

educated by the Social Democracy. Even before 1914, theoreticians like Luxemburg and Pannekoek, Gorter and Henriëtte Roland Holst had affirmed the primacy of mass-action over trade-union and parliamentary action. They had insisted, in particular, on the role of class-consciousness in the action of the proletariat; on the primacy of the 'spiritual factor' over the 'material factor' (the economic crisis) in the unleashing of the revolution. It was in the wake of the Russian Revolution that the key ideas of left-communism became more precise:

- the central role of the workers' councils in the proletarian revolution and the transformation of society;
- the central role of the *Unionen* and workers' committees in the process that gives rise to the councils;
- the political role of organs of economic struggle, like the *Unionen*, whose programme had to be directly revolutionary and whose activities had to be closely linked to that of the communist party;
- the role of the communist party as a catalyst of class-consciousness; the party's structure had to be that of a nucleus that regrouped not the broad masses, but selected minorities of the proletariat;
- the central role of the Western European countries, which would form the 'epicentre' of the world-revolution;
- the direct struggle for revolution in the industrialised countries, without using the old trade-union and parliamentary tactics; the struggle of the proletariat had become a struggle against the state and all its political parties, and had ceased to be a struggle for reforms that could gain the proletariat a place within the state.

Such was the physiognomy of this left-current of the Third International. Having germinated within the Second International, it fully flowered in the sunlight of the revolution in Germany, the most industrialised country in Europe.

The study of the German-Dutch left allows us to reply to a number of hasty assertions which characterise it as a current of 'Dutch personalities', as a current of 'Western Marxism', as a 'utopian-extremist' or 'syndicalist' current.

## 1 A 'Dutch School of Marxism'?

The Dutch Marxist current is often reduced to the personalities of Pannekoek and Gorter. Nothing could be more deceptive. Alongside them, Henriëtte Roland Holst played a role of no lesser importance than Rosa Luxemburg in

elaborating the theory of the mass-strike and of mass-action. A less well-known militant like Barend Luteraan was the decisive motor in the formation of the KAP in the Netherlands.

In reality, the interpenetration of the German and Dutch left-currents had been a constant from before 1914, when the names Pannekoek, Henriëtte Roland Holst and Luxemburg had often been associated. After 1920, we can still speak of the theoretical and organisational fusion of the two. Some nuances still existed between the left-communists, above all in the interpretation of the 'mortal crisis of capitalism'. The Dutch communists, especially Pannekoek, had a tendency to reject the conceptions of the crisis advanced by Luxemburg in her *Accumulation of Capital*, and later taken up by the KAPD. But the splits within the German-Dutch current never revealed national specificities: the political and theoretical divergences, such as on participation in economic struggles and the foundation of the KAI, cut across both the German and Dutch organisations.

As for the 'anti-authoritarian' and purely 'councilist' tendencies that some people think are characteristic of the Dutch, and Gorter in particular, they were hardly present in the Dutch left-communist movement in 1920; the real seed-bed for the councilist, anti-organisational and semi-anarchistic theories was in Germany, particularly in Saxony around Otto Rühle. It was the theories of Rühle that ended up predominating in the Dutch GIC and with Pannekoek, unlike the Berlin KAPD, which fully maintained its party-programme.

## 2 A 'Germanic' or 'Western-Marxist' Current?

The German-Dutch current is seen as a typically 'Germanic' current, born on the soil of the German Revolution. In this view, its typically 'Germanic' feature would be its rejection both of heavy union-bureaucracy and of organisational discipline, both expressions of Prussian military discipline. In the second place, it is seen as 'Germanic' insofar as it was part of the 'national-Bolshevik' reaction to the defeat of 1918. We know that Gorter and Pannekoek were accused by Wijnkoop of being 'pro-German'; and the KAPD was seen by the leadership of the Comintern as being a typical expression of German 'national Bolshevism'. Finally, it is seen as 'Germanic' because it considered the German revolution to be superior to the revolution in backward Russia.

While it is true that Germany was the centre of a strong reaction against bureaucracy, culminating in the theory of struggle against the 'leaders' and in Rühle's cult of anti-authoritarianism, it was not the only country where this happened. The anti-authoritarian current developed in many countries,

both 'Latin' as well as 'Germanic'. It was accompanied by a strong resurgence of anarcho-syndicalist and revolutionary-syndicalist tendencies, which, as in France, Spain and Italy, developed sympathies towards the Bolsheviks because of their rejection of the official Socialist movement, and through the discovery of Lenin's theses calling for the destruction of the state. But the majority of the left-communists – including Gorter, Pannekoek and the German KAPD – laid particular insistence on the need for organisational discipline and the formation of new proletarian leaders. Before 1914, the entire left, and Pannekoek in particular, faced with the federalist conceptions of the revisionists, were in favour of strict organisational discipline. For them, the mass-strike evolved from spontaneity to greater discipline in the organisation of the workers and of the political vanguard.

As for the so-called 'national Bolshevism' of the German-Dutch left, while it did express itself in the Laufenberg-Wolffheim current in the KAPD, it was immediately combated and excluded. Far from being 'pro-German', the left was, above all, the product of the revolutionary wave of 1917–23. Profoundly internationalist, it spread to countries as different as Britain and Bulgaria, and in the 1920s and 1930s to the USA, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, France and Denmark.

And concerning the 'anti-Russian' character of the left-communist movement, it did appear with Rühle, and then later on in the councilist movement, but this was not the case at first. The left-communists started off, as in the case of Gorter and Pannekoek against Wijnkoop, as the best disciples of Bolshevism and the Russian Revolution.

The stress on the importance of the revolution in Germany was not the expression of a rejection of the Russian Revolution or of any particularist tendencies. The German-Dutch left, just like the Comintern, always insisted on the vital stakes of the revolutionary struggle in Germany. This country was the key to the world-revolution, being the most industrialised country in Europe and the one most likely to draw the whole of Europe into the revolution, above all because it had a very concentrated and conscious proletariat that had been educated by decades of socialist propaganda and action. The criticisms made of Bolshevik policies were those of fellow Marxists trying to show that the proletarian revolution could only reach its fullest dimensions in the most developed countries. The extension of the revolution to these countries would prove that Russia had been the first outpost of the world-revolution, and not a model to be followed, given its economic and social backwardness. The Russian schemas being advanced by the Bolsheviks in the Comintern could not be valid in countries where the weight of the peasantry was limited and where trade-union tactics were definitively out of date.



Certain tendencies, like the 'Bordigist' current, later accused the German-Dutch left of being the pure product of a 'Western road to communism', as a kind of 'Western Marxism'. Nothing could be further from the truth. The Marxism of Pannekoek and Gorter found a very wide echo in a country as backward as Bulgaria. It gave rise to tendencies within the Bolshevik party, like that of Miasnikov, who associated himself with the KAPD. At the same time, as Marxists, Gorter and Pannekoek always stressed the unity of the world-proletariat, which demanded the same basic tactics in all countries, whether underdeveloped or developed. Despite certain of the ideas expressed by Gorter in 1920, with his conception of the 'geographical meridian', cutting Europe in two, very soon the predominant view was that the conditions for proletarian revolution were 'mature' in all countries and on all continents.

### 3 A 'Petty-Bourgeois Intellectual' Current?

The political adversaries of left-communism, at the time of its ascent, believed that they had found the 'key' to its existence and its radicalism in its sociological composition, its social basis and/or the socio-economic changes that had taken place in the proletariat.

The first explanation for 'left-radicalism' was the enormous influence of intellectuals who had been pushed into revolt and radicalised by the war and the revolution. In this view, intellectuals like Gorter and Pannekoek only had to give theoretical coherence to this revolt, which expressed the impatience typical of the petty-bourgeois intelligentsia. We know the influence exerted by the KAPD and the *Unionen*-movement on the German expressionist movement and Pfemfert's periodical *Die Aktion*; for a time, he had been a member of the KAPD. At the same time, this party – at the beginning – had been led by intellectuals like Schröder, Schwab, Reichenbach, Dethmann, Jung, Pfemfert and Rühle. But such a sociological explanation does not fit with reality. The presence of militants from a 'petty-bourgeois intellectual' background is a constant in revolutionary parties. The KPD, which developed this argument against the KAPD, had a leadership even more strongly composed of 'intellectuals', like Paul Levi, August Thalheimer and so on. In the second place, the presence of 'intellectual fellow-travellers' in the KAPD was of short duration, as seen by the departure of the 'anti-authoritarian' tendency around Rühle and Pfemfert, which certainly did express the impatience and distrust towards organisation characteristic of the individualist psychology of this 'intelligentsia'. In the third place, the left-communist movement was overwhelmingly composed of workers. 90–95 percent of the membership of the KAPs in Germany and Bulgaria

were industrial workers. In the Netherlands itself, where proletarian membership had been less overwhelming in the Tribunist SPD at the time of the 1921 split that gave rise to the KAPN, none of the old leaders from an intellectual background – Van Ravesteyn, Gerrit Mannoury, Henriëtte Roland Holst, and so on, with the notable exception of Gorter – were to join the new left-communist party.

What in fact characterised the *Linkskommunismus*-current was its great distrust towards the ‘intellectuals’, even revolutionary ones – the expression of a clear workerist tendency. This distrust was later theorised, above all by Pannekoek and Mattick, when they saw the ‘Marxist intelligentsia’ as the expression of a demand for state-capitalism by a particular social stratum, on the Russian model.

Another interpretation that is very widespread today, involves presenting left-communism as the reflection of the discontent of unskilled strata of the proletariat, opposed to the ‘labour-aristocracy’ of the educated, skilled workers. This conception was developed by an ex-member of the KPD, Paul Levi’s friend Curt Geyer. According to him:

... radicalism is the spiritual and voluntary behaviour of the lower strata of the proletariat ... the vulgar-Marxist, mechanistic theories of radicalism correspond to the ways of thinking of the workers of big industry. They are easily understandable and popular, because they correspond to the way their minds work.<sup>2</sup>

And he added, not without disdain for workers not lucky enough to be part of the ‘upper strata’, that ‘a weak intellect is more disposed towards radicalism than a strong intellect ...’

Less contemptuous in tone, but no less negative, is the judgement made by Arthur Rosenberg in 1932, in his *Geschichte des Bolschewismus: von Marx bis zur Gegenwart*,<sup>3</sup> which drives in the same direction as Geyer:

... this movement was made up of the poorest, the most desperate and most embittered workers. They passionately hated not only bourgeois society, but the whole social stratum whose life was a little less hard than theirs. They rejected all diplomacy and all compromise and only

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2 Geyer 1923.

3 English translation: *A history of bolshevism. From Marx to first five years' plan* (New York: Anchor Books, 1967).

accepted extremist actions. They rejected with fanatical distrust any form of organisation or authority and saw themselves as being betrayed the moment anyone recommended discipline or moderation.

One of the old leaders of the left wing of the KPD described this radicalism as 'utopian extremism'.

More recently, in the wake of the events of May '68, writers like Karl-Heinz Roth and Elisabeth Behrens, in their book devoted to 'the other workers' movement',<sup>4</sup> looked to changes in the sociological composition of the working class since the First World-War: to the emergence of the 'mass-worker', whose situation, with the introduction of Taylorism, is different from that of the skilled workers. The latter are reformist partisans of the trades-unions, whereas the 'mass-worker' is spontaneously opposed to the 'reformist' unions and in favour of radical revolutionary action. Apart from the writers' enthusiasm for these 'lower' strata of the proletariat, which they see as the sociological base of working-class radicalism and left-communism, the interpretation is essentially the same as that of Geyer and Rosenberg.

This sociological vision does not correspond to historical reality. The militants of the KAPD and the AAU came from all sectors of the German working class, from old industries as well as from new ones. Many of them worked in the great concentration of the Ruhr (mines, steel), in the Wasserkante (Hamburg and Bremen), in shipbuilding, in the merchant-navy and even the fishing-industry. In 1920, they had a very strong presence among the skilled workers of Berlin (transport, electricity, steel, and so on). Very strong in the major industrial concentrations, they also had many members in the small enterprises of Saxony as well as the huge Leuna chemical-plants (20,000 workers) near Halle, which were a bastion of the AAU and the KAPD. Furthermore, it was in the small factories of Saxony that the KAPD came up against the most problems: the workers affiliated to the AAU, unlike those of the big factories, showed a visceral distrust of any centralised organisation and of any discipline. In the end, they left the AAU for the anti-centralist AAU-E and developed a localist, workerist cult of 'the factory-chimney'. In the Netherlands, the KAPN had a lot of influence amongst old sectors of the working class (cigar-workers, diamond-workers, textiles), sectors that covered both highly skilled and unskilled workers, as well as amongst more modern sectors like shipbuilding. The leaders of the KAPN were often in 'old-fashioned' work: Emmanuel and Bram Korper were cigar-makers.

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4 *Die 'Andere' Arbeiterbewegung*, Trikont Verlag, 1976.

The social composition of the KAPD does not appear to show that it was overwhelmingly made up of unskilled workers. Many of the workers in the party were skilled, such as Appel, Rasch, Meyer, Wülfrath, Scharrer and Mattick. The majority of party-militants had been through the Social Democracy and the trade-union movement before the war. It was the same with the KAPD's mass-organisation, the AAU. While there were tendencies towards the rejection of organisation and authority, these tendencies were generalised throughout the German working class as a reaction against the Social Democracy and the trades-unions, which had participated in the war and smashed the Revolution with the aid of the *Freikorps*. It was more a political reaction than a rejection of the 'upper strata', of a 'labour-aristocracy' assimilated with the trades-unions. The fall in union-membership between 1919 and 1922 shows that even the skilled layers of the proletariat felt this same hostility towards the trades-unions. A significant number of the latter also joined the AAU.

Finally, another sociologically-based explanation was developed in the KPD by Paul Levi, the party-leader. According to him, 'left-radicalism'<sup>5</sup> was, because of its activism and putschism, an expression of the social weight of the 'lumpenproletariat', which, moreover, he assimilated with the unemployed. It is symptomatic that this position was rejected even by a determined adversary of the KAP like Karl Radek, who insisted on the revolutionary role of the unemployed.<sup>6</sup>

It does not at all appear to be the case that the KAPD, and left-communism in general, regrouped a significant fraction of the 'lumpenproletariat'. The latter constitutes a social stratum distinct from the unemployed, who are workers momentarily ejected from the process of production. Marx and the Marxists defined the 'lumpenproletariat' either as a sub-proletariat which had never been integrated into wage-labour and reduced to a state of vagabondage,<sup>7</sup> or as a stratum of declassed elements who have fallen into banditry. According to Marx, it forms a 'mass quite distinct from the industrial proletariat. It is a recruiting ground for thieves and criminals of all sorts, living off the garbage of society, people without a definite trace, vagabonds, *gens sans feu et sans aveu* [without a home, fearing neither God nor Law], varying according to the cultural level of their particular nation, never able to repudiate their *lazzaroni* character'.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> *Die Internationale* no. 26, December 1920.

<sup>6</sup> See *Die Internationale* no. 3, March 1921.

<sup>7</sup> *The German Ideology, Collected Works*, Vol. 5.

<sup>8</sup> *Class Struggle in France*, C.W., vol. 10, p. 62.

In fact, in 1920–21, a large part of the KAPD was composed of unemployed workers. In the unemployed-committees, KAPD members were elected in a crushing majority, as in Berlin. Very radical, the unemployed recognised themselves in the KAPD's call for revolution. The troops of Max Hölz and Karl Plättner in Central Germany in 1921 were in their majority unemployed workers. But when the membership of the KAPD began to decline and the perspective of revolution faded, the KAP was mainly composed of skilled workers, most of them still involved in production. At the beginning of 1930, when unemployment reappeared on a massive scale, the membership of the KAPD fell again. Many militants, plunged into demoralising long-term unemployment, left its ranks. In this period, the mass of unemployed workers joined the shock-troops of the KPD's *Roter Frontkämpferbund* (RFB), and, to a lesser extent, the Brown-shirts.

The sociological composition of left-communism, but also of Dutch council-communism in the 1930s, is an insufficient explanation for its audience, its activity, and its theory. The *raison d'être* of this current has to be sought in its political foundations.

#### 4 A 'Syndicalist' Current?

The favourite definition of left-communism by its adversaries in the Comintern was that it was a 'syndicalist current', a kind of 'utopian extremism' (according to Arthur Rosenberg) or 'sectarian proselytising'.

The 'syndicalist' nature of left-communism, and indeed of council-communism, does not appear at all obvious. In the particular sense of partisans of the *syndicat*, the *Gewerkschaft*, the trade-union, and thus of activity within the latter – then the 'syndicalism' of the Gorter-Pannekoek current is non-existent after 1919. On the contrary, it was a rigorously anti-syndicalist current, whose slogans were 'destruction of the trades-unions' or 'leave the trades-unions' (*Heraus aus den Gewerkschaften*). This condemnation of the classical social-democratic unions also extended to the small anarcho-syndicalist unions, like the NAS in the Netherlands, the Spanish CNT or the German FAU, and also – but to a lesser degree, given their political character – to the American IWW. The accusation of 'syndicalism' made by the Comintern was actually based on the formation of the AAU, in which the KAP had been the driving force. The AAU brought together tens of thousands of – probably more than a hundred thousand – industrial workers on political criteria, such as the rejection of parliamentarism and trade-unionism and the acceptance of the dictatorship of the proletariat through the workers' councils. These *Uni-*

*onen*, which were not seen as autonomous, had to recognise the political pre-eminence of the KAPD through its programme. This position was not so different from that of the KPD, which had formed its own unions at the beginning, then the 'Red trades-unions' attached to the Red Trade-Union International (*Rote Gewerkschafts-Internationale*). For the KAPD, the *Unionen* were not trades-unions, but organisations of a new type, politico-economic factory-organisations (*Betriebs-Organisationen*) whose aim was the creation of workers' councils under the 'spiritual' leadership of the party. As such, their fate was to disappear when the councils were formed. In the KAPD's view, their existence was therefore temporary. They were more the 'transmission-belt' of the KAPD among the working-class than real unions, which regroup workers on a professional basis without distinction as to political opinion or religious belief.

Nevertheless, this conception of the KAPD did leave the door open to syndicalist tendencies, to the kind of revolutionary syndicalism that manifested itself in the IWW. By developing permanent organisations – due to the fact that the situation was not developing towards the immediate formation of workers' councils – that participated in economic struggles, the *Unionen* appeared either as small radical trades-unions, autonomous vis-à-vis the KAPD, or as the KAPD's 'factory-groups'. Here lay the ambiguity of the whole project. Part of the KAPD believed that they had resolved this contradiction by launching the slogan of non-permanent 'struggle-committees' under the leadership of the *Unionen*. Another part increasingly affirmed the autonomy of the *Unionen*, which thus became a kind of 'rank-and-file' trade-union structure. This led to the birth of the AAU-E, which was openly federalist and anarchistic, to the point where it moved towards the FAU. This ultimately resulted in the break-up of the KAPD, when the militants of the AAU no longer wanted to recognise the political 'dictatorship' of the KAPD. What remained of the AAU then increasingly expressed activist and revolutionary-syndicalist tendencies.

## 5 A 'Utopian-Extremist' and 'Messianic' Current?

The criticisms advanced by Geyer and Rosenberg connect up with those of Lenin, who talked about left-communism as an 'infantile disorder'. For Curt Geyer (1891–1967), a former member of the USPD who then went into the KPD, left-communism was a kind of 'messianism'. He adopted the same arguments as those of Kautsky against Rosa Luxemburg, asserting that this was a 'teleological conception of the role of the masses in history', based on a 'mystical' vision of class-consciousness and a 'catastrophist' theory of history. These were 'the typ-

ical tactics of a sect', where 'slogans have become political concepts'.<sup>9</sup> Arthur Rosenberg made the same analysis, with a bit more sympathy, but also assimilating left-communism with Bolshevism: '... utopian extremism is a purely emotional movement and is incapable of elaborating any kind of doctrine or order. The utopian extremist workers also adhered in droves to Bolshevik ideas'.

Such assertions seem to be based on a moralising critique. 'Utopian extremism' appeared as an *a posteriori* explanation during the decline of the 1917–23 revolutionary wave. For the Comintern, at the beginning, as for its left-currents, the international proletarian revolution did not seem to be a form of 'utopian extremism'; its generalisation to Central Europe in 1919 was not a long-term, but an immediate task. For the first time in the history of humanity, the accomplishment of the world-revolution, involving the action of masses of workers, no longer appeared to derive from a 'teleological' vision of history, a new kind of 'prophetic mysticism', but as a reality. The 'catastrophist' theory of a definitive collapse of capitalism was shared throughout the communist movement: its contours could be seen in the destruction of the war, the outbreak of the economic crisis and of mass-unemployment. Again, in retrospect, we can say that the communist movement of the day underestimated the strength of capitalism, both at the economic and the political level. But as in the classics of Marxism, the emphasis was always on the factor of class-consciousness, which was, in the final analysis, the decisive revolutionary factor.

To say that 'extremist' communism was a purely 'emotional' movement, incapable of a coherent theoretical vision, is hardly convincing. Passion there certainly was, but it was a widely shared revolutionary passion, before the scepticism of defeat smothered it. This passion was nourished by a coherent theoretical vision, that of the 'decadence of capitalism', which had opened up a period of world-wars and revolutionary convulsions. Left-communism edified its strategy on the theoretical basis of the decadence of a now-obsolete system, rejecting the old parliamentary and trade-union tactics. This theory of 'decadence' was, furthermore, the very basis for the foundation of the Comintern in 1919. Certainly, left-communism seemed to nurture a fatalistic view of the revolution, via its theory of the 'death-crisis' or 'final crisis' of capitalism. But these exaggerations were more typical of the Essen current than of the Berlin current. Theoreticians like Pannekoek always had a strong distrust of this theory of the death-crisis, insisting that the crisis was only an operative factor if it was accompanied by the subjective factor of class-consciousness. But these divergences were not limited to this current: they also appeared within the

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9 Geyer 1923.

International as a whole, as could be seen from the debates at the Third and Fourth Congresses of the Comintern.

As for the 'sectarian' vision of left-communism, it is enough to show that its anti-parliamentary and anti-trade-union positions were shared by hundreds of thousands of workers in Europe in 1919–20. It was a mass, social phenomenon, and not the product of small isolated groups.

Certainly, the decomposition of left-communism, but also of the entire communist movement after 1924–7, into a number of small oppositional groupings, was a real phenomenon. It expressed a historic course of counter-revolution following the liquidation of the Russian and world-revolution. In order not to betray their principles, these small groups made the painful choice of isolation, which they never made a virtue of. These groups always attempted to intervene in the class-struggle, particularly among the unemployed. Like the Bolsheviks, the Spartakists and the Tribunists at the beginning of the First World-War, it was a question of going against the tide, with the long term aim of reconstituting a revolutionary workers' movement. This passage from a mass-movement to a nebulous state of multiple groups did, however, give rise to new forms of 'sectarianism'. These groups were often closed in on themselves and isolated within their national arenas. Contacts between them dropped off, and their very existence became problematical. Council-communism was an expression of this turn of events.

## 6 Continuity and Discontinuity between Left-Communism and 'Councilism'

The KAPD current seemed to express a political and theoretical continuity with the left-fractions of the Second and Third Internationals. It was situated on the terrain of the acceptance of the Russian Revolution as a proletarian revolution, despite the development of strong 'anti-Leninist' tendencies within it.

The Dutch left – whether Tribunist, left-communist, or council-communist – had a limited political role in the Netherlands itself. It is on the theoretical level, thanks to militants like Gorter and Pannekoek – but also Canne Meijer – that its influence became international. But without the German left-communist movement, that of the KAPD and the AAU, a movement produced by the German Revolution in 1918–20, this influence would have been more restricted.

The Dutch communist left developed its basic political positions (rejection of parliamentarism, trade-unionism, the united front, anti-fascism, national-liberation struggles, and party-dictatorship) within the German 'council-movement'. On certain points (the economic crisis, state-capitalism, the Russian



question, the function of the revolutionary organisation), it lagged behind the German communist left. Isolated in the limited context of the Netherlands, from the 1930s onwards its political and theoretical contribution was, perhaps, less developed than that of the 'Bordigist' communist left, in particular in the theoretical discussion on the problems of a 'period of transition towards communism'.

Because of its isolation, the Dutch communist left drew, above all, the negative lessons of the revolutionary period of the 1920s and then the counter-revolution that succeeded it on an international scale. As a result, Dutch council-communism opened the door to anarchist-individualist conceptions, which took it far from the German left-communism of the 1920s.

The German-Dutch 'councilist current', claiming descent from Otto Rühle, has, to all intents and purposes, disappeared. Its conceptions have lived on in those discussion-groups that arose not in organic continuity with it, but from the post-'68 wave. The rejection of political organisation, anti-substitutionism, and distrust towards theory, are, in the end, the expression of the trauma caused by the disastrous experience of the Bolshevik Revolution. 'Councilist' ideas, while not expressing themselves in an organised framework, have actually had a considerable influence among the radicalised workers and militants who came out of May '68 and for whom the trades-unions are something to be rejected. Because of this, council-communist conceptions today have a great deal in common with those of anarchism. But it is true that traditional anarchism, with its syndicalist positions, serves as a foil to 'councilism'.

Despite the disappearance of the organised council-communist current today, it has, nonetheless, served as an essential stepping-stone in the revolutionary movement, in its history and in its contradictory evolution. As the movement of May '68 showed, its positions on the workers' councils, on 'wildcat-strikes' and the autonomy of workers' struggles from the union-apparatus have had a certain influence on workers' consciousness.

In a historic period of world-economic crisis, and proletarianisation of the world-population ('globalisation'), where radical (internationalist) tendencies are once again coming to the surface, such positions are very likely to have an influence on the new workers' movement. In its praxis, this new movement will inevitably refer back to the old council-communist movement.



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## Further Reading

A bibliography on the communist left in the Netherlands cannot be limited to the sources and studies existing either in the Dutch language or in the Netherlands.

The merging of the KAPD current, descended from the *Spartakusbund* – with the Gorter and Pannekoek current – gave birth to an international revolutionary current, from 1920 onwards. This current developed simultaneously in a number of countries: Bulgaria, Russia, Austria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Great Britain; then – during the 1930s – in France, Belgium, Denmark and in the United States. The Dutch communist left must be placed in this international context, which shows something of the state of the subject. The existence of archives and documents, dealing with German-Dutch left-communism, in almost ten languages, gave us an idea of the scope of the research-work.

In this updated bibliography, we shall deliberately confine ourselves to a few countries, more particularly the Netherlands and Germany.

### Archival Sources

Russian State-Archive of Socio-Political History (Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial'no-politicheskoi istorii, RGASPI, Russian Centre for Preservation and Study of Records of Modern History): Dossiers 488–93: Comintern congresses; 495: *Exekutiv Komitee der Kommunistischen Internationale* (ЕККИ); 497: Amsterdam Bureau; 499: *West-Europäisches Büro* (WEB); 581: Wijnkoop archives; 626: Rutgers archives.

Het Rijksinstituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie (RIOD, Amsterdam): The State-Institute for War Documentation, in Amsterdam, includes an important dossier on the Marx-Lenin-Luxemburg Front led by Henk Sneevliet as well as illegal publications of this group (web: <http://www.riod.nl/collecties.html>).

IISG (Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis, Amsterdam). The website of the International Institute of Social History gives up-to-date descriptions of its archives: <https://socialhistory.org/en/archives>.

Above all, refer to the essential books of:

- Mies Campfens, *De Nederlandse archieven van het IISG*, Amsterdam: Van Gennep, 1989 (relates to the Archives of the International Institute of Social History).
- Henk Hondius and Margreet Schrevel, *Inventaris van het archief van de Sociaal-Democratische Arbeiderspartij (SDAP) 1894–1946*, working-paper, Amsterdam: IISG, 1985.

- Margreet Schrevel and Gerrit Voerman, *De communistische erfenis. Bibliografie en bronnen betreffende de CPN*, Amsterdam: IISG/DNPP, 1997. At the IISG, since the fall of Berlin Wall and the auto-dissolution of the CPN on 15 June 1991, all the documents of the Comintern (in the form of microfilms) from Moscow and all the archives of the party in the Netherlands can be consulted at the International Institute of Social History of Amsterdam. This book draws up the complete list of these archives.

For the archives of the Social Democracy, which contains exchanges of letters with the future Tribunist leaders (Gorter and Pannekoek):

- Archives Kautsky; Archives Troelstra; Archives Van der Goes; Archives Wibaut; Archives Saks; Archives SDAP (All these archives are at the IISG, Amsterdam.)
- For the left-socialist currents, which left the Sneevliet tendency, see Archives RSV, OSP, RSP, RSAP. For the inventory of the Archives of the IISG, see Atie van der Horst, *Inventaris van de archieven van het Revolutionair-Socialistisch Verbond (RSV), de Revolutionair Socialistische Partij (RSP), de Revolutionair Socialistische Arbeiders Partij (RSAP) in enkele afdelingen, gewesten en federaties van RSP, RSAP en Onafhankelijk Socialistische Partij (OSP), 1928–1940*; working-paper, Amsterdam: IISG, 1991.

With regard to the study of Tribunism and left-communism, in the Amsterdam IISG:

- Henk Canne Meijer (1890–1962) archives: incorrectly called '*Radenbeweging*' (the councils-movement); they deal, above all, with Gorter's KAPN, the KAPD and the KAI Essen tendency. Very important political correspondence between the left-communists of Germany, Bulgaria, Great Britain, the Netherlands, Denmark, and so on. The documents are in German, Dutch, and even in French. See *Inventaris Canne Meijer, Henk 1916–1938 (1944–1945)* ('Collectie Canne Meijer'), list of the papers of Canne Meijer, by B.A. Sijes, Amsterdam: IISG, November 1964, and Johanna Welcker, February 1973.
- Anton Pannekoek archives: catalogued (1964) by B.A. Sijes, they contain many unpublished works by the main theoretician of council-communism. His memoirs were published as: *Herinneringen: herinneringen uit de arbeidersbeweging, sterrenkundige herinneringen* (Amsterdam: Van Gennep, 1982). Pannekoek's papers still await publication. A fire during the war (in Arnhem in 1944) destroyed most of the written correspondence of the interwar period.
- Herman Gorter archives: the Gorter Archive in Bussum (where Gorter lived) includes some unpublished works and manuscripts, both political and literary. It includes letters to Kautsky, Pannekoek, Van Ravesteyn, Wijnkoop, and so on. Gorter destroyed many letters (including some from Lenin) in the 1920s.
- Gerrit D. Jordens (1877–1957) archives: engineer, KAPN treasurer in the 1920s, until 1925; Jordens collected internal papers, congress-minutes, correspondence and fin-

ancial statements. These archives are particularly important for knowledge of the KAPN's history.

- Barend Luteraan (1878–1970) archives: a member of the SPD from its foundation, representing the internationalist youth at the Bern conference in 1915, holding a position of responsibility in the KAPN, a born organiser. Gorter's friend, Luteraan left important archives at the IISG. They are not yet catalogued. They contain numerous letters by Gorter and Pannekoek. They are important with regard to the period of the split in the Dutch CP (1918–20).
- Gerrit Mannoury (1867–1956) archives: philosopher, mathematician, SDAP member, Tribunist, left the CPH in 1929. Founder of a Dutch Artists' and Intellectuals' Committee in 1933, he was one of the leaders of the committee against capital punishment in 1946. Correspondence with Trotsky and Henriëtte Roland Holst.
- Willem van Ravesteijn (1876–1970) archives: a 'Tribunist' then 'Communist' before his 1926 resignation from the Dutch CP, Van Ravesteijn left a correspondence with Gorter and Pannekoek before the split, as well as numerous documents from the communist left.
- Hendricus J.F.M. Sneevliet (1883–1942) archives: For the description of his archives at the IISG, see Atie van der Horst, *Inventaris van het archief van Henk Sneevliet (1883–1942)*, working-paper, Amsterdam: IISG, 1997; 112 p.
- Frits Kief (1908–76) archives: of German descent, Kief played a prominent role within the Dutch left until the Second World-War. His archives are catalogued. (See the website of the IISG.)
- Stan Poppe (1899–1991) archives: militant of the SDAP, SDP, OSP, RSAP, MLL-Front, a founder of the *Communistenbond Spartacus* of which he remained a leading member until its disappearance; he died in 1991; his archives have been catalogued. See Henk Hondius, *Plaatsingslijst van het Archief van Stan Poppe Sr. 1934–1988*, IISG, no date.
- B.A. Sijes (1908–1981) archives: Ben Sijes died in 1981; for the archives' classification see Anneke Welcker, Jack Hofman, *Voorlopige lijst van de collectie Benjamin A. Sijes (1908–1981)*, IISG, no date.
- (We should mention separately Wijnkoop's archives and that of the Dutch CP, which were formerly available at the old 'Marxist-Leninist Institute' in Moscow (today: *RGASPI*) The Amsterdam IPSO – the institute of CP history in the Netherlands – was provided with 20 microfilms, which can, therefore, be consulted in this city.)
- Apart from these archives, we should mention one archive of extreme importance for the German-Dutch left: that of Cajo Brendel, handed over to the Amsterdam IISG after his death.

### *On German and International Council-Communism*

- Karl Korsch archives: these contain manuscripts published in Germany and Italy. Korsch left part of his correspondence and some documents at the IISG in Amsterdam. See Götz Langkau, *Inventar Nachlass Karl Korsch 1911–1962*, Amsterdam: IISG, 1975. The Sammlung Karl Korsch contains material written by the *Rote Kämpfer* Group.
- Paul Mattick archives, 1921–81. For the inventory (manuscripts, correspondence) see Götz Langkau, *List of the Papers of Paul Mattick, 1921–1981*, Amsterdam: IISG, 1997. An important correspondence with Henryk Grossmann before 1939; with Adam Scharrer (1931–2), and Karl Korsch; after the Second World-War with Alfred Weiland, Walter Auerbach, Maximilien Rubel, Serge Bricianer, and so on.
- Otto Rühle archives: relates to the period 1933–43. In particular, correspondence with Erich Fromm, Paul Mattick, Trotsky, Jacoby. See: Klaus Ravenberg, *Liste des Archives Otto Rühle (1874–1943) 1933–1943 (1944)*, IISG, no date.
- Pankhurst archives: these archives of the Pankhurst family also include Sylvia's; she was a founding member of the *Workers' Dreadnought* group and of the English section of the KAI. One part is open to the public, and includes documents on the relationship between left-communism and Bolshevik Russia. See M. Wilhelmina H. Schreuder and Margreet Schrevel, *Inventory of the E. Sylvia Pankhurst Papers 1863–1960*, Working-paper, Amsterdam: IISG, 1989.
- Otto Reimers (1902–84) archives: member of AAU and the AAU-E, a member of the Saxon tendency, he left important archives on the latter (1922–33). A friend of André Prudhommeaux, after the war he belonged to the Commission for International Anarchist Relations (CRIA) and to the German FAU in the 1970s. Publisher of *Neues Beginnen* (1969–71), and then *Zeitgeist* (1971–8), Hamburg; anarchist-pacifist cultural reviews.
- Franz Peter Utzelmann (1895–1972) archives: this former member of the KAPD and *Rote Kämpfer* left archives, especially letters.

BDIC (Bibliothèque de documentation internationale contemporaine, Nanterre):

- Maximilien Rubel (1905–96) archives.
- Serge Bricianer (1922–97) archives.

The Friedrich Ebert Institute in Bonn:

- Karl Schröder and Henry Jacoby deposits: very few documents and letters, relating to council-communism.
- Paul Levi archives: sworn enemy of left-communism and of the KAPD, Levi's archives are nonetheless of great importance. Deposited at Friedrich Ebert Institute (and at the 'Buttinger-Library' in New York), they may shed light on the relationship between the right and the left of the KPD, before and after the split.

### *Other Archives*

The KAPS' members do not seem to have kept and handed over important archives to institutes or libraries. Except for their publications (papers, brochures), these remain quite sparse in Germany, Denmark, Sweden, USA, and so on.

- Alfred Weiland archives: important archives of this German council-communist militant at the *Freie Universität* of West Berlin. He has sold an impressive quantity of documents and books to the university's library, on *judaica*, freemasonry, KPD, council-communism. See: Sylvia Kubina, *Die Bibliothek des Berliner Rätekommunisten Alfred Weiland (1906–1978)* (Berlin: Freie Universität, 1995).
- Harald Andersen-Harild archives: important archives concerning the Dutch, German, Danish and American councils-movement in the 1930s. Many reviews and booklets of the GIC, the KAPD, the KAU, and so on at the ABA in Copenhagen. See Straede (Therkel), 'Lektor, raadskommunist Harald Andersen-Harild Jr. 1906–1980', Copenhagen: Arbejderbevaegelsens Bibliotek og Arkiv, 1982.

German state-archives concerning the KAPD and the *Union*-movement:

Bundesarchiv Koblenz:

- AAU (KAP): 1–68/1 fol. 1–216;
- Organisation '*Rote Kämpfer*': R 58/448;
- Linksradikale Organisationen (1924–9): 403/13369–13793;
- Generalakten des Justizministeriums: 135/214 P; 135/8466 P; 135/8472 P; 135/8476 P;
- Reichssicherheitshauptamt: R58/530; R58/532; R58/552; R58/607; R58/763.

Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv in München:

- Abteilung II, Geheimes Staatsarchiv München:
- Polizeiberichte über Bolschewismus, Kommunismus, Spartakusbewegung, 1919 bis 1932: MA 100 412–17;
- Lageberichte der Polizeidirektionen München und Nürnberg über radikale Bewegungen 1924: MA 101 235;
- Die Entwicklung der politischen Organisationen und wichtigsten Vereine (police-headquarters in Munich, 1925): MA 106 562.

Hauptstaatsarchiv Düsseldorf (Zweigarchiv Kalkum):

- AAU 1921–2: 15 536;
- KAPD 1921–2: 15 681;
- *Kommunistische Arbeiter-Jugend* 1921–2: 15 680;
- *Kommunistische Arbeiter-Jugend* 1926–8: 16 949;
- *Rote Armee* (constituted in April 1920 in the Ruhr): 15 785/786;
- *Leninbund*, KAPD: 30661.



Microfilmed Archives (Koblenz): see Ernst Ritter (ed.), *Lageberichte (1920–29) und Meldungen (1929–33). Reichskommissar für die Überwachung der öffentlichen Ordnung und Nachrichtensammelstelle im Reichsministerium des Innern*, Bundesarchiv Koblenz (BAK), Munich-New York-London-Paris: KG Saur publishers, 1979.

Schweizerisches Sozialarchiv (Zürich):

- KAPD and AAU leaflets 1920–21: 365 106 Z.

For the open archives of the former GDR and those of the Stasi, the SAPMO Archives, see: Michael Kubina, *Fall Weiland. Von Utopie, Widerstand und kaltem Krieg. Das unzeitgemässe Leben des Berliner Räte-kommunisten Alfred Weiland (1906–1978)* (Münster-Hamburg-Berlin-London: Lit Verlag, 2001), pp. 497–501.

## Papers and Reviews

### Germany

Here we list all the available periodicals of the German left, from its birth until after the Second World-War. Most of them can be found at the IISG in Amsterdam and at the Staatsbibliothek in Berlin.

1914–18

- *Arbeiterpolitik*, 'Wochenschrift für wissenschaftlichen Sozialismus', Bremen, 1916–19. (Anonymously reprinted in the 1970s, in several books.) Many articles by Lenin, Radek, Zinoviev, Pannekoek.
- *Die Internationale*, 'eine Monatsschrift für Praxis und Theorie des Marxismus', April 1915. Published by Rosa Luxemburg and Franz Mehring. Düsseldorf. One issue. Reprint, East-Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1965.
- *Bremer Bürgerzeitung*, 1907–18 (Bremen: A. Henke)
- *Jugendruf*, 'Mitteilungsblatt des Jugendbildungsvereins der Arbeiterschaft von Dresden und Umgebung', Dresden, 1916. Influenced by Otto Rühle.
- *Der Kampf*, Hamburg, 1916, illegal, published by the 'Linksradikalen' of Hamburg.
- *Lichtstrahlen*, Berlin 1913–19. Published by Borchardt, one of the representatives of the *Linksradikalen*, which he left at the end of 1918. Subtitle: Monatliches Bildungsorgan für denkende Arbeiter.
- *Proletarier-Jugend*, 'Mitteilungsblatt der Freien Jugendorganisation von Hamburg-Altona und Umgegend'. The *Linksradikalen* tendency, 1916–17.
- *Spartakus-Briefe*: the underground Spartakist paper (1916–18) was re-published in 1958, East Berlin: Dietz Verlag.
- *Der Stürmer*, 'Kampfzeitung für die Arbeiter Jugend Deutschlands', 1917, no date, clandestine. Organ of the revolutionary youth.

- *Der Volksfreund*, Pirna (Otto Rühle's tendency).
- *Vorbote*, 'internationale marxistische Rundschau', Zürich/Bern, 1916, published by Pannekoek and Henriëtte Roland Holst. From the point of view of the left.

1918–33

We mention here the papers coming either from the KAPD and its splits, or from the *Union*-movement, in the broad sense; also, as a comparison, the papers of the Trotskyist movement and of Hugo Urbahns, the *Rote Kämpfer* within the Social Democracy, then outside it. Though not closely related to the KAPD and *Union*-movement, they were to the left of the KPD.

The KAPD and the political currents that emerged from it.

- *Arbeiterbrief*, illegal paper published by the KAU/KAP, 1933.
- *Brand*, 'Organ für die Betriebsorganisation der KAI', Berlin, 1926–7. Split from the Essen KAI; Emil Sach, editor-publisher, expelled from the official KAI in 1926.
- *Brief an Arbeiter*, illegal paper published by the KAU/KAP, 1933.
- *Die Epoche*, 'Kampforgan des Kommunistischen Rätebundes', 1923–4, Leipzig. Saxon split of the KAPD. Hostile to the two KAPs and to the AAU-E of Otto Rühle and Franz Pfemfert.
- *Geist*, 'Halbmonatsschrift der zielbewussten Sozialisten', published by the 'Sozialistischer Bund'. Independent, close to the national Bolsheviks from Hamburg and the KAPD. Led by one of the leaders of the KAP: Fritz Wendel, 1920, with the initial participation of Goldstein and Schröder.
- *Der Junge Kommunist*, KAPD-youth organ, Berlin 1922.
- *Kampfsignal*, illegal paper published by the KAU/KAP, 1934–5?
- *Der Kommunist*, Dresden, organ of the IKD (no. 1, 16 November 1918), then organ of the KPD(s) till November 1919; since April 1920 organ of the KAPD (Ost-Sachsen); after December 1920, 'Organ der kommunistischen Arbeiterschaft Ostsachsens und der AAU'. Organ of Rühle's tendency. [Led by the carpenter Heinrich Heynemann (1885–?). He was interned in 1933, as a KAU member, and in 1946 joined the SED which he left in 1950, while maintaining political contact with Weiland.] Replaced in January 1921 by *Die Revolution*.
- *Kommunistische Arbeiter-Zeitung*, organ of the KPD (*Spartakusbund*), then organ of the KAPD and AAUD. Hamburg 1919–20. National-Bolshevik tendency of Laufenberg and Wolffheim.
- *Kommunistische Arbeiter-Zeitung*, KAPD organ in Western Saxony (West-Sachsen), Halle, 1920.
- *Kommunistische Arbeiter-Zeitung*, 'Organ der KAPD, angeschlossen der KAI', Essen, March 1922–9. Tendency of Schröder and Gorter, KAPD (Berlin) split.
- *Kommunistische Arbeiter-Zeitung*, published in 1919 as illegal organ of the KPD in

- Berlin; became the official organ of the KAPD, Berlin 1920–33. Almost daily in 1920–21, then bi-weekly, later weekly, then monthly from 1931 onwards.
- *Kommunistische Montags-Zeitung*, Organ der KAPD, Berlin, 1920–21. Paper coming out on Mondays.
  - *Kommunistischer Arbeiter*, ‘Organ der KAPD-Opposition’, Berlin, November 1927–April 1928. KAP split in Berlin. Returned to the party.
  - *Die Kommunistische Sturmglöcke*, ‘Organ der KAP und der Betriebsorganisationen für Sachsen-Anhalt’, Magdeburg, 1920. Karl Plättner and Paul Hahn (1893–1960) were among its editors.
  - *Korrespondenz-Blatt* der KAPD, ‘angeschlossen der KAI’, 1924–30, Berlin. Irregular. Essen tendency. Led by Hugo Fichtmann (1902–1943).
  - *Der Marxist*, ‘Organ der KAU’, illegal, 1933.
  - *Neuer Rundschau*, illegal paper published by the KAU/KAP, 1933.
  - *Proletarier*, ‘Zeitschrift für Kommunismus’, December 1923–March 1924. Replaced the Berlin KAZ, banned by the Prussian government.
  - *Proletarier*, ‘Monatsschrift für Kommunismus’. The KAP’s theoretical organ from 1920–21. After the split, it fell into the hands of the Essen tendency until 1923. It became the KAI’s organ. From 1924 until February 1933, it again became the theoretical organ of the Berlin tendency. Subtitled: ‘Zeitschrift für revolutionären Klassenkampf’.
  - *Rote Fahne*, Frankfurt, from October 1919 to 1920. ‘Communist organ of the revolutionary proletariat’. Became the organ of the KAPD (Wirtschaftsbezirk Frankfurt am Main).
  - *Rote Jugend*, ‘Kampforgan der Kommunistischen Arbeiter-Jugend’, irregular. Berlin, 1921–30.
  - *Rote Jugend*, Essen, 1922. Rival organ of the Berlin youth-tendency. The Essen tendency suppressed it, being hostile to the idea of a special youth-organisation.
  - *Rote Kämpfer-Korrespondenz*, printed weekly circular, Freital/Gittersee, June 1932–February 1933.
  - *Der Rote Rebell*, illegal paper published by the KAU/KAP, 1934–5?
  - *Scharf Links*, ‘Organ der Räte Kommunisten (Bezirk Mitteldeutschland)’, KAU, Leipzig, 1932–February 1933. Published by O. Quarg. Otto Andreas Quarg (1901–1974) was expelled from the KPD in 1927, and became a member of the KAP/AAU, then of the KAU. In 1933 with his wife Johanna he emigrated to Czechoslovakia, then to Sweden.
  - *Spartakus*, ‘Organ der Kommunistischen Partei für die Provinz Schleswig-Holstein’; Kiel 1919; 8 Nos. Adolf Dethmann (Kiel) was one of the editors of this radical review.
  - *Spiegel des Faschismus*, illegal paper published by the KAU/KAP, 1933.
  - *Vulcan*, Organ der KAI, Berlin, 1925–7. Berlin split of the Essen tendency. Led by some old members of the KAI: Emil Sach, then Paul Knetter, Paul Böhm. Irregular.

- *Zur Information*, published by the GHA of the KAPD. Irregular internal bulletin from 1924–7, but sold externally also. Berlin.
- *Zur Information*, illegal paper published by the KAU/KAP, 1933.

*Unionen* and Factory-Organisations (*Betriebs-Organisationen*, BO).

Created before the KAPD, the *Unionen* defined their identity relative to the KAPD; binding themselves either to this party, or to Rühle's 'Saxon' tendency, or clearly stating their local autonomy against any political current.

- *Die Aktion*, 1911–32, Berlin-Wilmersdorf. Published by Franz Pfemfert (1879–1954), a literary man and political activist. From 1919, he had a pro-KAPD orientation. From 1921 to 1926, *Die Aktion* was the review of the Unionist movement (AAU-E), following the break with the KAPD in October 1920. After 1927, he became a partisan of Trotsky. Reprint: *Die Aktion 1911–1918. Wochenschrift für Politik, Literatur und Kunst* (Cologne: DuMont Reise Verlag, 1987).
- *Arbeiterpolitik*, 'Flugzeitung der AAU Gross-Hamburg', 1929.
- *Die Allgemeine Arbeiter-Union*, 'Wirtschaftsbezirk Mitteldeutschland, Braunschweig', 24 August 1920 to 1921. IWW tendency.
- *Der Arbeitslose*, 1923, 'Organ der Aktions-Ausschüsse Deutschlands', Berlin, published by the AAU and the KAPD (Essen tendency) for the unemployed. Published (without mention of name and place) by Hugo Fichtmann, Leo Fichtmann (1873–1942) and his own son Max (1898–1943), KAI. The Fichtmann, who were Jews, disappeared in Nazi *lagers* in 1942–3.
- *Arbeiterunion*, 'Organ der revolutionären Betriebsorganisationen', AAU (Württemberg), 1920.
- *Die Betriebs-Organisation*, Berlin, 1921, published by the AAU-E.
- *Die Betriebs-Organisation*, Leuna, 1921, published by the AAU (*Betriebsorganisation*) section of the Leuna works.
- *Betriebs-Organisation*, Frankfurt, 1926, AAU-E.
- *Die Einheitsfront*, Berlin, AAU-E, 1921–6. Integrated into the *Spartakusbund* no. 2 in 1926. Pfemfert's tendency. Hans Fittko was one of the editors.
- *Die Fackel*, 1919, Braunschweig. German DeLeonist organ.
- *Die Fackel*, Braunschweig, 1921–23. Organ of the *Sozialistische Industrie-Arbeiter Union Deutschlands* (SIAUD), close to the American IWW.
- *Hammerträger*, 'Organ der Sozialistischen Jugendföderation'. AAU-E, Berlin, 1925.
- *Internationale Nachrichten Organisation (INO) Presse Korrespondenz*, Frankfurt, January 1930–January 1933. Published by the 'Pressediens der Internationalen Kommunisten', in collaboration with the Dutch GIC. Essentially of news-content, open to all radical leftist currents. Edited by Karl Kraus and Ernst Liebetrau.
- *Internationale Informationsstelle*, published by the Heidenau tendency in Saxony in 1925.

- *Der Junge Unionist*, published by the AAU of Berlin, in the 1920s. Editor: Friedrich Parlow (1906–1983).
- *Der Kampfzruf*, ‘Organ der AAU’, Bremen, November 1919 to April 1920.
- *Der Kampfzruf*, ‘Organ der AAU (Revolutionäre Betriebs-Organisationen, Ost-Sachsen)’, 1920. Rühle’s tendency.
- *Der Kampfzruf*, ‘Organ der AAUD’, Berlin, 1920–33. From January 1932 onwards, it became the KAU organ after the *Unionen*’s unification. Editorial staff in 1932–3: Ernst Biedermann, Richard Radt. After 1945 both became members of the GIS (Weiland’s circle).
- *Der Kampfzruf*, ‘Organ der AAUD’, Berlin, June 1922–6. Essen tendency.
- *Der Klassenkampf*, ‘Organ der AAU (Revolutionäre Betriebs-Organisationen)’, Düsseldorf, 1920–24. Organ for Rheinland-Westphalia.
- *Die Klassenfront*, ‘Organ der AAU-Opposition’, Berlin, November 1927–April 1928. Split from the AAU. KAP Berlin tendency; then returned to the former.
- *Die Klassenfront*, Berlin, 1929. AAU organ, replaced *Kampfzruf* after the latter was temporarily banned.
- *Die Klassenfront*, Berlin, 1932. AAU organ, again replaced *Kampfzruf* after it was banned by the government.
- *Die Proletarische Revolution*, ‘ohne Beordnung durch Solidarität zur Freiheit’, Frankfurt, 1926–32. From No. 20, 1927 onwards, published by the AAU-E (Willy Schwab and Fritz Parlow). Ceased publication in 1932, after the *Union* merged with the KAU.
- *Die Perspektive*, ‘Kampforgan der Union revolutionärer Betriebs-Organisationen (proletarische Klassen-organisation)’, 1923–4, Leipzig. Unionist organ created by the *Rätebund*. According to Theo Pinkus, it was edited by Ernst Joël (1893–1929), a Berlin GP. He had been editor – with Gustav Landauer, Kurt Hiller, Rudolf Leonhard and Bernhard Reichenbach – of the youth socialist-pacifist monthly review *Der Aufbruch*, ‘Monatsblätter aus der Jugendbewegung’, in 1915, and then of the *Flugblätter für die deutsche Jugend* (1915–19).
- *Proletarischer Zeitgeist*, ‘eine von Arbeitern für Arbeiter geschriebene Zeitung’, Zwickau 1922–33. Anti-intellectual and anti-organisation tendency close to anarchism. Weekly paper, influential in Western Saxony. The clandestine review *Manhruf*, replaced it, 1933–4; published in Hamburg by former AAU-E members, like Otto Reimers, Paul Zinke (1901–45) and Ernst Fiering (1887–1945), both these latter murdered in the Neuengamme lager.
- *Der Rätekommunist*, AAU-Einheit, 1922–3. Wirtschaftsbezirk Mittelsachsen. 23 Nos.
- *Der Rätekommunist*, AAU-Einheit, Frankfurt, 1930–31. Published by Fritz Parlow, a council-communist, then social-democrat in Berlin in the 1950s–70s.
- *Räte-Korrespondenz*, ‘theoretischer und organisatorisches Diskussions-organ der AAU; herausgegeben von Reichs-Arbeits Ausschuss’, 1931, Berlin. Preparatory discussion-organ of German Unionists heading for the fusion in December.

- *Die Revolution*, 'Organ der AAUD, Gross-Dresden (Ost-Sachsen)', Rühle's tendency in 1921. 1922–3, Organ der AAU-E, in Heidenau, district of Eastern Saxony (Ost-Sachsen). Weekly paper, at the beginning. Publisher: Willy Hollmann.
- *Seemanns-Union*, Organ of the International Seamen's Union, Stettin, 1922–4? The AAU, AAU-E and FAU joined this International together.
- *Spartakus*, organ of the *Spartakusbund der Linkskommunistischen Organisationen*, called *Spartakusbund No. 2*, Dresden, 1926–33, bi-monthly. Fusion of the Ivan Katz group and Franz Pfemfert's group. Independent of the AAU. One of the editors in 1932–3 was the journalist Hans Fittko (1903–60), who emigrated in 1933 to Czechoslovakia, then in 1938, with his comrade Lisa Eckstein, to France, then in 1941 to Spain, and eventually to Cuba and in 1948 to the USA, where he died.
- *Der Sturm*, AAU Bremerhaven, 1919–20. With the subtitle 'IWW'.
- *Der Unionist*, Organ der AAU, Hamburg, 1919–23?.
- *Der Unionist*, Berlin, AAU organ. Replaced the banned *Kampfruf* in 1931. Responsible publisher: Emil Herbert (1901–?), imprisoned in 1933, then illegal activity with Alfred Weiland.
- *Von unten auf*, 'Organ der AAU-E, Wasserkante (Hamburg)', 1923. Replaced *Der Unionist*, Hamburg.
- *Wellenbrecher*, 'Bordzeitung der Seeleute', Cuxhaven 1926–9; AAU (*Betriebs-Organisationen*). The Unionist seamen formed one of the strongest AAU sections at the end of the 1920s. Edited by Ernst Schneider (Ikarus).
- *Der Weltkampf*, AAU, Berlin, 1921. Replaced the banned *Kampfruf*.
- *Der Weltkampf*, AAU-Einheit, 1919–23, Zwickau (West Saxony). With No. 37, 1923, it became the organ of the FAU (anarcho-syndicalists). Led by Willy Jelinek.
- *Die Weltrevolution*, 'Flugschrift des Spartakusbundes (politisch-wirtschaftliche Einheits-Organisation)', 1932. Paper written by Unionists hostile to unification, sticking with the *Spartakusbund No. 2*.

#### Left-wing splits from the KPD

- *Die Entschiedene Linke*, Berlin, 1926, organ of the group of the same name, led by Ernst Schwarz. Integrated into the KAPD in 1927.
- *Kampffront*, Berlin, 1928–33. Organ of the *Industrie-Verband Metall*, split from the RGO (*Rote Gewerkschafts-Opposition*, KPD union-confederation). Close to Karl Korsch.
- *Kommunistische Politik*, 'Diskussionsblatt der Linken', 1926–7, Mönchengladbach, the organ of Korsch's group.
- *Mitteilungsblatt*, 1926, Nieder-Sachsen. The organ of Ivan Katz's group.

#### After the Second World-War:

Repression and dislocation led to the disappearance of the German left during the Hitler period.

After the war, groups sprang up claiming to draw inspiration from it, but, in most cases, they were quite distant from it.

- *Zur Information*: 'Erkenntnis, Bekenntnis, neuer Weg', November 1945; 'Zur Frage der Einheitspartei', December 1945; 'Nationale Frage und Arbeiterklasse', January 1946; 'Die internationale Lage und die Arbeiterklasse', February 1946; 'Zur deutschen Situation. Zerfall der bürgerlichen Klassenbasis', May 1946; 'Sein und Bewußtsein', July 1946, no place mentioned. Published as circulars by ex-KAPD/AAU militants (Weiland's group), Western Zone.
- *Neues Beginnen*, *Blätter internationaler Sozialisten*, Zürich/Berlin March 1947–54. Close to 'councilism'. Led by Alfred Weiland, then – after November 1950 – by Willy Huhn. Edited by the Groups of International Socialists (GIS).
- *Pro und contra*, 'Beiträge zur Zeit', Berlin, 1949–54. With the sub-title 'weder Ost noch West – eine ungeteilte sozialistische Welt'. Led at the beginning by the ex-SAP member Willy Huhn, of a councilist orientation.
- *Thomas Münzer-Briefe*, Stuttgart, 1949–50. Edited by a former member of the SAP, the journalist Fritz Lamm (1911–77). More left-socialist than councilist.
- *Funken*, 'Aussprachehefte für internationale sozialistische Politik', Berlin 1950–59, after the merger with Fritz Lamm's 'Thomas-Müntzer Briefe' group in 1950.
- *Stirn und Faust*, 'Vervielfältigte Manuskripte werktätiger Menschen', Leverkusen 1952, Published by Emil Sach (1887?–1955?), a former member of the KAI.
- *Von unten aus*, 'Blätter für unmittelbare Demokratie', Berlin 1956. Published by Jan Wohlrab (an alias of Fritz Parlow) and Willy Huhn.
- *Politikon*, 1963–82, 'Göttinger Studentenzeitung', edited by student-circles (*Club Politikon*) in Göttingen (Lower Saxony), influenced by 'councilist' ideas.
- *Die Soziale Revolution ist keine Parteisache*, Berlin 1971, Nos. 1–2. First purely council-communist organ in Germany after 1968.
- *Sozialistische Informationsblätter*, published by the *Föderation Neue Linke* (FNL); *Rätekommunisten* (FNL/R), Mainz 1971, 'Organ einer rätekommunistischen FNL-Fraktion'.
- *Neues Beginnen*, Hamburg, 1969–71, published by Otto Reimers, former AAUD-E member, and collaborator of Alfred Weiland in the old *Neues Beginnen* in Berlin.
- *Schwarze Protokolle*, 'Zur Theorie der linken Bewegung', Berlin, 1972–78. This review claimed its inspiration from 'anarchism' and 'councilism'; some important theoretical articles of Cajo Brendel were published in it.

### *Austria*

- *Kommunistische Arbeiter-Zeitung*, 'Organ der KAP Österreichs, angeschlossen der Kommunistischen Arbeiter-Internationale', printed in Mühlheim (Ruhr), 1922–4. A small nucleus formed round the paper, dependent on the Essen KAI and led by Stanislaus Geiger and Joseph Lumpi.

- For the anarchist and council-communist press in the German speaking countries in the twentieth century, the Berlin website DaDa gives an excellent database: <http://ur.dadaweb.de/>

### **Bulgaria**

- *Bolshevishko Zname* ('Bolshevik Flag') Sofia, July 1919 (left-communist group led by E. Ederov).
- *Nasha Duma*, Sofia, October–December 1919. (left-communist tendencies)
- *Spartak*, Sofia, December 1919–January 1920, organ of left-communists within the BKP.
- *Sotsialisticheski pregled* ('Socialist Review'), 1919–21, radical paper, between left-communism and syndicalism.
- *Iskra*, weekly organ of the left-communist groups in Sofia in 1920, after the split in the Bulgarian CP (BKP). 60 issues: 4 September 1920–29 December 1921. No. 11 of 13 November 1920 published Bordiga's theses against parliamentarism. Replaced by:
- *Rabotnitcheska Iskra*, Varna, which became the BRKP's organ after its Sliven founding conference in January 1922. Contact for the publication: Zh. Dikidzhiev, who was the secretary of the Executive Committee.
- There were two organs, related to the two tendencies of Sofia and Varna after 1923:
- *Rabotnitcheska Iskra*, organ of the BRKP, Varna tendency, Varna: December 1921–June 1923; as mentioned above; led by Ivan Kolinkoev, Zh. Dikidzhiev, *et alii*.
- *Proletarii*, 'polumesechno spisanie za rabotnitsi' (bi-monthly review for workers), organ of the KAI in Bulgaria, Sofia November 1924–April 1925.

### **Denmark**

- *Mod Strømmen* (Against the Current), 'udgivet af Gruppe Internationale Kommuniste (Denmark)', Copenhagen 1930, linked to the Dutch GIC and to the German KAU. Published by Harald Andersen-Harild, who had represented the ideas of the German left in Denmark from the beginning of the 1920s.
- *Marxistisk Arbejder Politik* (Marxist Workers' Politics), 'organ for Raads-Kommunisten, udgivet af Gruppe Internationale Kommuniste (Denmark)', Copenhagen, 1931–2. Published by Harald Andersen-Harild.

### **United States**

#### a) In German:

- *Chicagoer Arbeiter-Zeitung*, published by the Chicago IWW, 1931. The leading force was Paul Mattick.
- *Kampfsignal*, New York, 1934, 'gewidmetes Organ der deutschen revolutionären Arbeiter New Yorks'. Linked to Mattick's group. (Followed after 1935, in English, by *Proletarian Outlook*, New York, roneoed.)



## b) In English:

- *Council Correspondence*, for theory and discussion. Published by the 'United Workers' Party', October 1934–October 1935, Chicago. Mattick's group.
- *International Council Correspondence*, 1935–7, Chicago. Subtitled: 'all power to the workers' councils! The means of production in the hands of the workers!'
- *Living Marxism*, February 1938–Autumn 1941, Chicago.
- *New Essays*, 1942–3, Chicago.

All these reviews have been re-issued in facsimile since 1970 by the Greenwood Reprint Corporation, with a foreword by Paul Mattick. The summary in French can be found in *La contre-révolution bureaucratique* (Paris: 10/18, 1973), pp. 297–307. (Re-editions in English.)

*France*

A few rare publications defended council-communist ideas, especially in the 1930s. As in the USA, 'councilism' found an echo amongst immigrants.

- *L'Ouvrier communiste*, Paris, 1929–31. Succeeded *Réveil communiste* which was still marked by 'Bordigism'. This group of Italian immigrants, under the influence of the KAPD, the AAU and the GIC, adopted the positions of council-communism.
- *Spartacus*, Paris, 1931. Subsidised by André Prudhommeaux and Jean Dautry, this paper regrouped a circle of immigrant German workers (A. Heinrich's and H. Schieschke's group). Hans Schieschke, a friend of André and Dori Prudhommeaux, was a member of the KAU in 1931 and lived for some months in Paris. He worked illegally for the KAU after 1933. He had contact with the Weiland group after 1945, and worked as journalist for the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* until 1949, when he was finally sacked.
- *Correspondance internationale ouvrière*, Nîmes, September 1932–June 1933, published by André Prudhommeaux and Jean Dautry. In contact with Dutch and German 'councilism'. Later, however, it moved towards anti-fascism and anarchism. [See: *A contretemps*, 'André Prudhommeaux, un anarchiste hors les murs', no. 42, Paris, February 2012].
- The *Union Communiste's* journal *L'Internationale*, given its semi-Trotskyist positions on the Spanish Civil War, cannot formerly be considered as a council-communist review. From 1937 onwards, it had close contacts with the Dutch council-communist left. Only after the Second World-War did the positions of the German and Dutch left become better known in France, especially through the medium of *Internationalisme*, whose origins lay in the Italian communist left, and the RKD-CR, the council-communist circle of Maximilien Rubel (*Cahiers de discussion pour le Socialisme de conseils*) and *Socialisme ou Barbarie*.

### *Great Britain*

The IWW, the shop-stewards' movement and the German left all influenced the council-communist movement in Britain, as did libertarian ideas. We shall list the main organs of the council-communist movement:

- *The Commune*, Glasgow, 1923–8, published by Guy Aldred, anarchist and council-communist. Organ of the Anti-Parliamentary Communist Federation.
- *The Council*, Glasgow 1931–3, published by Aldred. Organ of the Anti-Parliamentary Communist Federation. In favour of the regroupment of anti-parliamentary Marxists and anarchists. Recommended 'councils of action'.
- *The New Spur*, 'because the workers need a spur more than ever, if they are to conquer bread, freedom and roses' (sic), December 1933–April 1934. Published monthly in Nîmes, thanks to the help of André Prudhommeaux, in contact with the Dutch LAO. (see below). Influenced by Guy Aldred's ideas.
- *Solidarity*, 'advocate of workers' revolutionary unity', London, 1938–45. Published by the Anti-Parliamentary Communist Federation, after Aldred's group seceded in 1933 to form the Workers' Open Forum. Strongly influenced by the positions of the German-Dutch communist left. Contributions by Jimmy Kennedy, an examiner, of the 'Glasgow Marxian Study Group', and Ernst Schneider, a member of the Wilhelmshaven IKD in 1918. The group became the 'Workers' Revolutionary League' in 1941, eventually joining a new Workers' Open Forum which was formed in 1942.
- *The Spur*, June 1914–April 1921, Glasgow, published by the 'Bakunin Press', continuation of Aldred's *The Herald of Revolt*. Anarchist at the beginning then influenced by council-communist ideas.
- *Workers' Dreadnought*, London, July 1917–June 1924. Replaced the *Women's Dreadnought* (March 1914–July 1917). Published by the ex-feminist Sylvia Pankhurst, in the name of the Workers' Socialist Federation. In June 1920 the WSF joined the Communist Party (British Section of the Third International). After leaving the CPGB in 1921, the *Dreadnought* defended the positions of the German communist left. From 1922–4 it was the organ of Gorter's KAI in Britain. Disappeared in 1924.
- *Out of work*, Pankhurst's CWP's organ for the unemployed, 1922–3.

### *The Netherlands*

The Dutch communist left, born in 1907 around the review *De Tribune*, expelled from the SDAP in 1909, was indeed at the origin of the German communist left (KAPD). Through its theoreticians Gorter and Pannekoek, it shone forth far beyond the Netherlands, so much so that it was the 'spiritual leadership' of the whole international council-communist current.

## a) Before 1918:

- *De Baanbreker*, organ of the Utrecht SDP Section, 1910.
- *De Nieuwe Tijd* (New Times), 1896–1921, from 1908 organ of the Tribunists in Amsterdam.
- *Het Socialisme*, Amsterdam, 1907–21, theoretical organ of the Dutch left. Many contributions by Gorter and Pannekoek.

## b) 1918–1940:

- *Actie*, published by working-groups of council-communists, Amsterdam, without any dates. Jointly distributed with *Proletenstemmen*, among the seamen and dockers of Amsterdam.
- *De Arbeidersraad* (The Workers' Council), 1933–7, 'orgaan van Kommunistische Arbeiders Groepen in Nederland'. Amsterdam. Published by former members of the KAPN: the Korpers and Frits Kief. Contains etchings by the artist Gerd Arnzt (1900–88), who was a militant of the KAPN. Council-communist, it later adopted an anti-fascist and semi-Trotskyist perspective.
- *De Baanbreker* ('The Pioneer'), 'orgaan van de kommunistische Arbeiders-Jeugd', 1922–5. Published by the KAPH youth. Under the influence of Verduin and Luteraan (pseudonym: Baanbreker).
- *Discussie*, 1935–7, 'organ der linkse arbeidersgroeperingen', Leiden, split from the GIC.
- *De Internationale*, organ of the opposition within the SPD, Amsterdam, 1918–19. This opposition, lead by Gorter, Luteraan, Korper and Pannekoek, was to give birth to the KAPH.
- *Klasbatalo*, 'teoria kaj diskuta organo pri la problemoj de nova laborista movado' (in Esperanto), 1936–9, Nos. 1–17, published by the GIC as a 'council-communist fraction' within the SAT, Amsterdam, for Esperantists worldwide.
- *De Kommunistische Arbeider*, organ of the KAPN, 1921–31. With the splits and the struggles between tendencies, the leadership and the location of its editorial offices changed.
- *De ongeldige Stem* ('Null Vote'), published by 'anti-parliamentarist revolutionaries'; the introductory sentence goes: 'any parliamentary act gives help to the fascist reaction'. Published by independent 'councilists' 1936–7, Nos. 1–22.
- *PIK* (*Persdienst van de groep van Internationale Communisten*), published monthly by the GIC from 1928 to 1938, Amsterdam. Subtitled: 'all power to the workers' councils! Production in the hands of factory-organisations!' Seven (anonymous) contributions by Pannekoek.
- *PIK*, *Pressdienst der Internationalen Kommunisten-Holland*, irregular German publication of the GIC, in 1933.
- *Proletarier*, Amsterdam, 1933, organ in German of the GIC, one issue only. Articles by Korsch, Pannekoek.

- *Proletarier, Internationale Presse-Korrespondenz der KAPH*, Rotterdam, 1932, published by Frits Kief and former members of the KAPN ('Korporatie'), in German.
  - *Proletariër*, around 1935, split from the GIC in The Hague.
  - *Proletarische Beschouwingen* ('Proletarian Considerations'), published by the councilist group of The Hague, 1936–8, in which Cajo Brendel participated. Subtitle: 'Workers themselves'; 'All power to workers' councils'.
  - *Proletenstemmen* (Proletarian Voices), 1937–8, Nos. 1–124, published by 'The Workers' Group of Council-Communists', Amsterdam. Agitational organ essentially aimed at the unemployed. Linked to the GIC.
  - *Raden-communisme*, 1938–40, Amsterdam, jointly published by the GIC and the *Proletenstemmen* group. 'Marxist monthly for the autonomous class-movement'. Succeeded *PIC*.
  - *De Radencommunist*, The Hague, 1933, Nos. 1–12, published by the Hague council-communist group, most of them former members of the KAPN.
  - *Räte-Korrespondenz*, Amsterdam, 1934–7 (22 issues), 'theoretical and discussion-organ of the council-movement', jointly published by the GIC and German and Danish council-communists. Mattick's group in the USA brought out the English version.
  - *De Roode Vaan* ('The Red Flag'), 1919–21, Amsterdam, 'independent organ for communist politics', published by Luteraan and the opposition in the Dutch Communist Party. At the origin of the KAPN.
  - *De Roode Vaan*, 1927–31, Nos. 1–10, 'Amsterdam district organ of the KAPN'. Published by Luteraan's group, opposed to the Korpers' and Kief's KAPN.
  - *Soldaten-brieven* ('Soldiers' Letters'), end of 1939, published by the Hague council-communist group. Anti-militaristic propaganda. Subtitled: 'Workers have no fatherland'.
  - *Spartacus*, 'op voor de radenorganisatie', Rotterdam, 1932–4, LAO organ (*Linksche Arbeiders Oppositie in Nederland*), 'in favour of council-organisation'. NAS split, led by Eduard Sirach in Rotterdam. Van der Lubbe was in close contact with the LAO, which in 1933 approved of the Reichstag fire.
  - *Spartacus*, published by a 'revolutionary workers' cell'. Against anti-fascism, in favour of anti-militarism and internationalism. Published the texts of the 'Anti-militaristic International Commission'. (IAK). Around 1936–9.
  - *Werkloozenkrant*, Nos. 1–3, Leiden, October–November 1932, review for unemployed people, anti-parlamentarist, edited by Marinus van der Lubbe.
- c) 1945–
- *Arbeiders-eenheid* ('Workers' Unity'), organ of the *Communistenbond Spartacus*, advocating Unions, on the German model; 1944, Amsterdam. Clandestine.
  - *De Bedrijfsraad* ('The Factory-Council'), 1944–46, Amsterdam, 'orgaan voor een be-

- drijfsorganisatie'. Organ of the *Communistenbond Spartacus*, published for factories. 'Councilist' propaganda for Unions.
- *Daad en Gedachte*, 'marxistisch discussieorgaan', October 1953–September 1997. Theoretical organ of the *Spartacusbond*, the journal became independent after September 1964, dedicated to 'the problems of the autonomous class-struggle'. Principally animated by Cajo Brendel.
  - *Klasbatalo*, Nos. 18–27, 1946–50 (follows the pre-war serial).
  - *Maandblad Spartacus* ('Spartacus Monthly'), 1945–7, Amsterdam. Theoretical review of the aforementioned group.
  - *Spartacus*, clandestine paper of Sneeveliet's *Marx-Lenin-Luxemburg Front*, printed. After the departure of the Trotskyists from the group in 1943, the orientation became more and more 'councilist'. In 1945 it was reissued legally. Weekly magazine, organ of the *Communistenbond Spartacus*, which GIC militants joined.
  - *Radencommunisme*, Amsterdam, 1948. Occasional council-communist review published by former members of the GIC, B.A. Sijes, Canne Meijer, and Jan Appel, after leaving the '*Communistenbond*'.
  - *Uit eigen kring*; 'internal organ' (then 'bulletin') of the *Communistenbond Spartacus*, 1945–76.

The influence of council-communism, after 1937 in particular, was deep in the Flemish region of Belgium. Its occasional mouthpiece was the Internationalist Communist League, which published a bilingual *Bulletin* and distributed the Dutch 'councilist' press. The influence was even greater after the war. But the Belgian councils-movement does not seem to have had any press. We should also mention the weekly cultural review *De Vlam* ('The Flame'), 1946–52, with which Frits Kief, Wijnand Romijn, Sam de Wolf and Henriëtte Roland Holst collaborated, and which published councilist articles. However, its contents and its orientation were foreign to the council-communist movement, being closer to left-socialism and pacifism.

### *Czechoslovakia*

Council-communism appeared late in this country, mainly in German Bohemia and in Prague. A group from the Czech CP in 1929 made contact with the KAPD and published *Spartacus*, Gablonz (*Jablonec nad Nisou*), 1929–32.

The group, essentially composed of German-speaking workers, seems to have evolved towards the politics of the Berlin '*Rote Kämpfer*'.

## Texts

### *Rosa Luxemburg*

The German-Dutch left was justified in claiming a descent from Luxemburg, whose theses on the decline of capitalism, the impossibility and the rejection of national-liberation struggles, the spontaneity of the masses, and so on, influenced the KAPD's theoreticians.

The majority of the Rosa Luxemburg's works are easily available in English and French. Note also the so-called complete works in German, published by the former GDR, which are, in reality, quite incomplete:

- *Gesammelte Werke*, 5 Vols. (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1972–90).
- *Politische Schriften*, 3 Vols. (Frankfurt, Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1966–7).

### In English

- *Selected Political Writings* (New York: Grove Press, 1974).
- *Rosa Luxemburg Speaks* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970).
- *The national question* (selected writings; translated from the Polish and the German; edited with an introduction by Horace B. Davis) (New York/London: Monthly Review Press, 1976).
- *The Accumulation of capital* (translated by Agnes Schwarzschild; with a new introduction by Tadeusz Kowalik), (New York: Routledge, 2003).
- *The crisis in the German social-democracy* (New York: H. Fertig, 1969).
- *Theory and practice* (translated by David Wolff) (Detroit: News and Letters Committees, 1980).
- *The National Question* (selected writings on the national question) (London/New York: Monthly Review Press 1976).
- *What is Economics?* (New York: Pioneer Publishers, 1954).
- *The mass strike* (London: Bookmarks, 1986). With an introduction by Tony Cliff.
- *Reform or Revolution* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1973).
- *Letters of Rosa Luxemburg* (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, N.J. 1993).
- *Leninism or Marxism? Organisational Questions of Russian Social Democracy*, Independent Labour Party, 1935. (Numerous reprints)
- For a bibliography, see: J.P. Nettl, *Rosa Luxemburg*, Vol. 2 (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), pp. 864–934.

### *Herman Gorter*

#### In Bulgarian

- *Komunisticheskiya rabotnitcheski internatsional. Dve taktiki* ('The KAI. Two tactics') (Sofia: Fotinov', 1924).

## In Russian

- *Istoritcheskii materializm i sovremennoe estestvoznanie: marksizm i leninizm* ('Historical Materialism and Contemporary Science: Marxism and Leninism') (Moscow: 'Krasnaja nov', 1924).

## In English

- 'One Communist Party', 1920, reprint: *World Revolution*, No. 8, London, 1976.
- *The World Revolution* (Translation by H. McMillan), Glasgow: Socialist Information and Research Bureau (Scotland), 1920. (Gorter is introduced as a 'Professor at Moscow University').
- *Open letter to comrade Lenin, A reply to 'left-wing' communism, an infantile disorder*, in *Workers' Dreadnought*, London, 12 March–11 June 1921. New edition: 'Wildcat pamphlet', London, 1989. Extracts also appear in Helmut Gruber's *International Communism in the era of Lenin* (New York: Anchor Press, 1972).
- *Pannekoek and Gorter's Marxism* (London: Pluto Press, 1978). This contains the following texts by Gorter: 'The Origins of Nationalism in the Proletariat', 1915. This is a section of the pamphlet *Der Imperialismus, der Weltkrieg und die Sozial-demokratie*; 'The Organisation of the proletariat's class-struggle' (Berlin, 1921).
- 'Why we need the Fourth Communist Workers' International' (1921), *Workers' Voice* first series No. 13, 1975.
- *The Communist Workers' International* (1923), London 1977.

## In French

Gorter's political works translated into French are few in number:

- *La Révolution mondiale*, Bruxelles: Editions socialistes, 1919.
- *L'Internationale ouvrière communiste* (1923), translated by *Invariance* (series 11), No. 5, 1974.
- *Lettre ouverte au camarade Lénine* (1920), re-issued by the 'Cahiers Spartacus', Paris 1979, with an introduction and unpublished translations by Serge Bricianer.
- *L'opportunisme dans le Parti communiste hollandais* (1919).
- *Les leçons des Journées de mars* (1921).

These latter two texts have been translated by Denis Authier: *La Gauche communiste en Allemagne (1918–1921)* (Paris: Payot, 1976).

## In German

- *Organisation und Taktik der Proletarischen Revolution* (Frankfurt: 1969) collection of texts by Gorter and Pannekoek published by H.M. Bock.
- 'Die Ursachen des Nationalismus im Proletariat', extract from *Der Imperialismus, der Weltkrieg und die Sozial-Demokratie* (Amsterdam, 1915).

- *Die Russische Revolution*, extract of *Die Weltrevolution* (Amsterdam, 1918).
- *Offener Brief an den Genossen Lenin*, 1920. Web: <http://www.left-dis.nl/d/kindo.htm>
- *Die Klassenkampf-Organisation des Proletariats* (Berlin, 1921).
- In 1972 the Scandinavian group '*Kommunisten*' re-issued in full Gorter's text published in 1923 in *Proletarier: die Kommunistische Arbeiter-Internationale*, 1923.

Never re-issued but of fundamental significance:

- *Die Moskauer Internationale* (Berlin: KAPD, 1921).
- *Die Notwendigkeit der Wiedervereinigung der Kommunistischen Arbeiter-Parteien Deutschlands* (Berlin-Mariendorf, 1923).
- *Der Weg des Dr Levi, der Weg der VKPD* (Berlin: KAPD Verlag, 1921). Gorter may be one of the co-authors (Chapter 3).

#### In Dutch

Full bibliography available at the Letterkundig Museum en Documentatiecentrum in The Hague.

- *Verzamelde werken, Vol. I–VIII*, Bussum/Amsterdam: Van Dishoeck/Querido, 1948–52 (literary works), edited by Jenne Clinge Doorenbos and Garmit Stuijveling.

For the complete bibliography of his political works, see the (fundamental) book by Herman De Liagre Böhl: *Herman Gorter, zijn politieke activiteiten van 1909 tot 1920 in de opkomende kommunistische beweging in Nederland* (Nijmegen: SUN, 1973), pp. 291–309. He mentions articles and pamphlets in German, English, and Dutch.

#### *Anton Pannekoek*

Political texts by Pannekoek were published in Dutch, German, French, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, Swedish, Russian, Danish, Norwegian, Rumanian, Ukrainian, Finnish, Esperanto and Serbian, and probably in many other languages.

For a bibliography, see: C. Malandrino's book, *Scienza e socialismo* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1987), pp. 276–309.

#### In Russian and Ukrainian

- *Religija i socialism*, translated by I. P-n (St. Petersburg: 'Amiran', 1906).
- *Etika i socialism*, translated by P. Gurevich (St. Petersburg: 'Mir', 1907).
- *Komunizm i demokratija* (Kiev, 1920). Translation of *Bolschewismus und Demokratie* (Neumünster, 1919).

#### In English:

- *Pannekoek and Gorter's Marxism*. Contains: 'Marxist Theory and Revolutionary Tactics', 1912 (from *Die Neue Zeit*), 'World Revolution and Communist Tactics', 1920. *De Nieuwe Tijd*: 'Afterword to World Revolution and Communist Tactics'.



- *Lenin as Philosopher: A Critical Examination of the Philosophical Basis of Leninism*. (Translated by the author from the German Edition) (New York: New Essays, 1948). Original German, 1936; reprint: London: Merlin Press, 1975.
- ‘The position and significance of Joseph Dietzgen’s philosophical work’. An introduction to J. Dietzgen’s *The Positive Outcome of Philosophy* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 1906).
- ‘The Party and the Working Class’, 1940–41, Solidarity. Republished in: *Class War on the Home Front*, (London: Wildcat group, 1986).
- *Religion and socialism*. A lecture held in Bremen, translated from the German (Detroit: Emancipator, 1906).
- *Marxism and Darwinism* (Translated by Nathan Weiser.) – Chicago: Charles H. Kerr and Co., 1912.
- *Workers’ Councils*, ed. by the review *Southern Advocate for Workers’ Councils*, Melbourne 1950. Original Dutch, 1946; republished in 1948 in the review *The Southern Advocate for Workers’ Councils*.
- *Workers’ Councils* (London: AK Press, 2002). With an introduction by Noam Chomsky.
- *Anthropogenesis. A study of the origin of man*; translated from Dutch by the author (Amsterdam: Noord-Holl. Uitg., 1953). Summaries in English, French and German; original Dutch, 1945.
- *A History of Astronomy* (translated from Dutch by the author) (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1961). Original Dutch: 1951; several reprints; it was translated into Russian in 1966.
- *Pannekoek and Gorter’s Marxism*, edited and introduced by D.A. Smart (London: Pluto Press, 1978).
- *Pannekoek and the Workers’ Councils*, ed. by Serge Bricianer; introduction by John Paul Gerber. Translated from French by Malachy Carroll (Saint Louis, USA: Telos Press, 1978). Contains a selection of texts and extracts.

Articles by Pannekoek can be found in the following periodicals: *International Socialist Review*, a monthly journal of international socialist thought, Chicago, Charles H. Kerr and Co., 1900–17; *The New Review*, a Weekly Review of International Socialism, New York 1913; *The Communist International*, New York 1919; *International Council Correspondence*, Chicago 1934–7; *Science and Society*, A Marxian Quarterly, New York 1937; *Living Marxism*, Chicago 1938–41; *Modern Socialism*, New York 1941; *New Essays*, Chicago 1942–3; *Southern Advocate for Workers’ Councils* (Formerly the *Southern Socialist International Digest*), Melbourne 1947–8; *Politics*, New York 1946, a review edited by Dwight Macdonald (1906–82); *The Western Socialist* (paper of the Workers Socialist Party of the United States), Boston 1948; *Industrial Worker*, IWW, Chicago 1948; *Retort*, anarchist quarterly, New York 1948; *Capital and Class*, London 1977.

A full bibliography of his scientific work (mostly in English) is available at the Astronomical Institute 'Anton Pannekoek' at the University of Amsterdam: write to the Sterrenkundig Instituut 'Anton Pannekoek', Kruislaan 403, 1098 SJ Amsterdam; Tel.: +31 20 525 7491/7492; Fax: +31 20 525 7484; e-mail: [secr-astro@astro.uva.nl](mailto:secr-astro@astro.uva.nl).

#### In French

There is a good selection of texts, translated, introduced and annotated by Serge Bricianer, *Pannekoek et les conseils ouvriers* (Paris: EDI, 1969). The following have also been republished:

- 'Situation et signification de l'œuvre philosophique de Josef Dietzgen', Leiden, 1902, in J. Dietzgen, *L'essence du travail intellectuel humain* (Paris: Champ libre, 1973).
- *Lutte de classe et nation*, Reichenberg, 1912, in Josef Strasser et Anton Pannekoek: *Nation et lutte de classe*, (Paris: 10/18, 1977).
- *La théorie de l'écroulement du capitalisme*, 1934, in Denis Authier and Jean Barrot (eds.), *La Gauche communiste en Allemagne*, (Paris: Payot, 1976).
- 'Le syndicalisme'; 'Les conseils ouvriers'; 'Au sujet du parti communisme' (1936) in: *La contre-révolution bureaucratique* (Paris: 10/18, 1973).
- 'Le développement de la révolution mondiale et la tactique du communisme' (1920), in *Invariance*, No. 1, July–September 1969.
- *Lénine philosophe* (1938, in German), in *Cahiers Spartacus*, 1970, with a foreword by Mattick and remarks by Korsch. (Web: <http://www.left-dis.nl/f/lenintro.htm>)
- *Les conseils ouvriers* (Paris: Béliabaste, 1974 [1946]).
- Letters from Pannekoek to Chaulieu (Castoriadis), 1952, in: *Cahiers du communisme de conseils*, No. 8, Marseilles, May 1971.
- *Correspondance 1953–54, Pierre Chaulieu-Anton Pannekoek*, with introduction and commentaries by Henri Simon, 'Echanges et mouvement', Paris, September 2001.

#### In Dutch

- See the collection of (anonymous) texts published in the *PIC* during the thirties:
- *A. Pannekoek: Partij, raden, revolutie*, published, with very informative and well-informed notes, by Jaap Kloosterman (Amsterdam: Van Gennep, 1970).
- Philosophical works were also re-issued in Dutch: *Darwinisme en marxisme* (1909); *Dietzgen's werk* (1909); *twee natuur-onderzoekers* (1917); in *Serie herdrukken*, by the *Radencommunisme Groep*, No. 1, Beverwijk, 1980.
- *Het ontstaan van de mens* (1944) (Amsterdam/Antwerp: Wereld-Biblioteek, 1957).

#### In German

A number of texts have been republished, but for the most part they are hard to find:

- *Neubestimmung des Marxismus*, 1 (Berlin: Karin Kramer Verlag, 1974), with an intro-

duction by Cajo Brendel, and a quite complete bibliography, pp. 105–15 of Pannekoek's works.

- *Die Linke in der Sozial-demokratie, Jahrbuch* 3, 1974. Collection of articles from before the First World-War, presented by Hans Manfred Bock. There is a copious bibliography of articles, books and pamphlets from before 1914, pp. 158–67.
- 'Die Zusammenbruchstheorie des Kapitalismus', in *Zusammenbruchstheorie des Kapitalismus oder revolutionäres Subjekt* (Berlin: Karin Kramer Verlag, 1973). Introduction by Paul Mattick.
- *Organisation und Taktik der Proletarischer Revolution*, already quoted collection with: 'Marxistische Theorie und revolutionäre Taktik'; 'Kautsky über die neue Taktik' (1912); 'der Imperialismus und die Aufgabe des Proletariats' (1916); 'Weltrevolution und kommunistische Taktik' (1920).
- 'Ein Kämpferleben. Abschied von Herman Gorter' (1927) in Herman de Liagre Böhl, *Met al mijn bloed heb ik voor U geleefd. Herman Gorter 1864–1927*, Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Balans, 1996, pp. 285–9.

### Otto Rühle

In English

Very little of Rühle's work has been published in English:

- *From the bourgeois to the proletarian revolution* (Glasgow/London: *Revolutionary Perspectives*/Socialist Reproduction, 1974 [1924]). Web: <http://www.left-dis.nl/>.
- *The struggle against fascism begins with the struggle against bolshevism* (London: Bratach Dubh Editions, 1981). (Originally in *Living Marxism*, Vol. 4, No. 8, 1939, reprinted in 1970 by the Greenwood Reprint Corporation). <http://www.marxists.org/archive/ruhle/1939/ruhle01.htm>

In French

- *La crise mondiale, ou vers le capitalisme d'Etat*, (Paris: NRF, 1932), under the pseudonym Carl Steuermann.
- *Fascisme brun, fascisme rouge* (1939), translated by the Cahiers Spartacus. 1975. With Mattick's text: 'Otto Rühle et le mouvement ouvrier allemand'.
- 'La lutte contre le fascisme commence par la lutte contre le bolchevisme', in *La contre-révolution bureaucratique* (Paris: 10/18, 1973).

In German

- *Schriften* (Perspektiven einer Revolution in hochindustrialisierten Ländern) (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1971). Contains: *Brauner und roter Faschismus*; *Weltkrieg-Weltfaschismus-Weltrevolution*; *Briefe*. Also contains also a bibliography of Rühle's works, pp. 216–17.

- *Baupläne für eine neue Gesellschaft* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1971). Contains an unpublished essay: *Mut zur Utopie*.
- *Erziehung zum Sozialismus* (Berlin: Verlag Gesellschaft und Erziehung, 1919). Re-issued, Osnabrück: Archiv antiautoritärer Erziehung, n.d.
- *Der U.S.P. Friede* (Großenhain, 1919).
- *Die Spaltung der K.P.D. (Spartakusbund)*, Großenhain: Bezirks-Sekretariat Ostsachsens, 1919.
- *Schlagworte der U.S.P.* (Dresden-Heidenau: Buchhandlung der K.A.P., 1920).
- *Das kommunistische Schulprogramm* (Berlin, 1920).
- *Liebe–Ehe–Familie* (Dresden, 1921).
- *Arbeitsschule: Sozialisierung der Frau* (1922), re-issued in Osnabrück: Archiv anti-autoritärer Erziehung, no date.
- *Die Revolution ist keine Parteisache* (Berlin, 1920); *die Räte* (1921) in Frits Kool, *Die Linke gegen die Partei-Herrschaft*, (Freiburg: Walter Verlag 1970).
- *Grundfragen der Organisation* (Dresden, 1922), reprint Hinkelstein-Press, 1970.
- *Von der bürgerlichen zur proletarischen Revolution* (Dresden: Buchholz Friedewald, 1924); reprint Berlin: Rüdiger Blankertz Verlag, 1970. Web: <http://www.left-dis.nl/d/prolev.pdf>.
- *Die Revolutionen Europas*, Vols. 1–3 (Dresden, 1927).
- *Karl Marx. Leben und Werk* (Hellerau bei Dresden, 1928).
- *Zur Psychologie des proletarisches Kindes* (Frankfurt, 1969 [1925]).
- *Illustrierte Kultur und Sittengeschichte des Proletariats*, Vol. 1 (Berlin, 1930; reprint Frankfurt, 1970). Vol. 2 published by Henry Jacoby (Lahn-Gießen: Focus-Verlag, 1977).
- *Weltkrise – Weltwende. Kurs auf den Staatskapitalismus* (Berlin: S. Fischer, 1931). Written under the pseudonym Carl Steuernmann.
- *Imperialismus in Mexiko. Ertrag einer Mexiko-Reise*, without place, 1931, written under the pseudonym Carl Steuernmann, after a journey to Mexico.
- *Der Mensch auf der Flucht*, written under the pseudonym Carl Steuernmann (Berlin, 1932).

### **Karl Korsch**

From 1928–1930, Korsch gradually moved towards the communist left. During his emigration he became a fellow-traveller of the Dutch and German left, making important theoretical contributions to its journals, particularly those in the USA.

### **In English**

- *Marxism and Philosophy* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970 [1923]).
- *Karl Marx* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1938).
- *Three essays on Marxism* (London: Pluto Press, 1971). ('Introduction to Capital', 1932; 'Why I am a Marxist', 1935; 'Principles of Marxism', 1937).

- *Revolutionary Theory* (London: Pluto Press, 1981). A selection of Korsch's political writings.

#### In French

- *Marxisme et contre-révolution*, a collection of translations of political texts with comments by Serge Bricianer; (Paris: Le Seuil, 1975).
- *Marxisme et philosophie* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1964).
- *Au cœur de la conception matérialiste de l'histoire* (Paris: Cahiers Spartacus, 1979).
- *L'anti-Kautsky (la conception matérialiste de l'histoire)* (Paris: Champ Libre, 1973).
- *Karl Marx* (Paris: Champ Libre, 1971). Afterword by Paul Mattick.

#### In German

- *Gesammelte Aufsätze* (Frankfurt: Ullstein 1974).
- For a bibliography of Korsch's political and philosophical works, see Michael Buckmiller, in *Jahrbuch 1: über Karl Korsch*, Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1973, pp. 86–102. (*Jahrbuch 2*, 1974, also published Korsch's letters to Mattick, Paros, and so on).

Korsch's political works from 1912 to 1950 have been republished in their entirety:

- *Gesamtausgabe*, 9 Vols., under the direction of Michael Buckmiller. In particular:
- *Recht, Geist und Kultur. Schriften 1909–1919*, Vol. 1 (Frankfurt, 1980).
- *Rätebewegung und Klassenkampf. Schriften zur Praxis der Arbeiterbewegung, 1919–1923*, Vol. 2 (Frankfurt, 1980).
- *Marxismus und Philosophie. Schriften zur Theorie der Arbeiterbewegung 1920–23*, Vol. 3 (Amsterdam, 1993).
- *Krise des Marxismus. Schriften 1928–1935*, Vol. 5 (Amsterdam, 1996).
- *Marxism, State and Counterrevolution. Aufsätze und nachgelassene Schriften, 1938–1956*, Vol. 7, 2003.
- *Briefe 1908–1958*, Vols. 8 and 9, 1998.

These books – Offizin Verlag, Hannover, with the support of the IISG of Amsterdam – can be ordered by writing to the following address: Offizin Verlag, Bödekerstrasse 75, 30161 Hannover. Tel/fax: 0511.624730, mail: [info@offizin-verlag.de](mailto:info@offizin-verlag.de)

#### Paul Mattick

A bibliography of Mattick's works was put together by Paul Mattick Jr., B.A. Frandsen and Michael Buckmiller, in *IWK*, West-Berlin, No. 2, June 1981, pp. 190–224. With an introduction by Frank Dingel: 'Paul Mattick (1904–1981)'.

### In English

It is impossible to mention all the pamphlets and articles of Mattick. But in particular see:

- ‘The Permanent Crisis’, 1934, *International Council Correspondence*, republished in *Communist Review*, No. 5, 1987.
- ‘The masses and the avant-garde’, in *Living Marxism*, No. 4, August 1938.
- ‘Otto Rühle and the German Labor Movement. Stalinism and Fascism. A Socialist Criticism of Bolshevism’, in *Essays for Students of Socialism*, Melbourne 1945.
- *Spontaneity and Organisation*, 1949.
- ‘The Party and the Working Class’, August/September 1941, *Solidarity*, republished in *Class War on the Home Front* (London: Wildcat Group, 1986).
- *Critique of Marcuse* (London: Merlin Press, 1972).
- *Anti-Bolshevik Marxism* (London: Merlin Press, 1978).
- *Marx and Keynes* (London: Merlin Press, 1969).
- *Economics. Politics and the Age of Inflation* (London: Merlin Press, 1978).
- *Economic Crisis and Crisis Theory* (London: Merlin Press, 1981). Web: <http://www.left-dis.nl/uk/ecomatt.pdf> (1974 text)
- *Marxism: last refuge of the bourgeois?* (London: Sharpe/Merlin Press, 1983).
- *Humanism and Socialism* (Paris: Echanges, 2003).

We can also refer to the original pamphlets, often not reprinted:

- *The inevitability of communism. A Critique of Sydney Hook's Interpretation of Marx*, New York, 1935. This text, a critique of Sidney Hook's 1933 book *Towards the Understanding of Karl Marx*, was published in New York by Polemic Publishers, edited by S.L. Solon.
- *Bolshevism or communism*.
- *Worldwide fascism or world revolution*.

### In German

The following texts by Mattick, from before the Second World-War, have not been translated into either English or French:

- *Arbeitslosigkeit und Arbeitslosenbewegung in den USA 1929–1935* (Frankfurt: Verlag Neue Kritik, 1969). This text was written in 1936, but never published.
- ‘Probleme der neuen Arbeiterbewegung’, March 1936; ‘Diskussionsbeitrag’, two texts from *Räte-Korrespondenz*, republished in *Partei und Revolution* (Berlin: Kramer Verlag, no date).
- ‘Zum Marxschen Akkumulations und Zusammenbruchstheorie’, R.K. 1934; die Todeskrise des Kapitalismus, 1933. Republished in *Zusammenbruchstheorie des Kapitalismus oder revolutionäres Subjekt* (Berlin: Karin Kramer-Verlag, 1973).

**Sylvia Pankhurst**

In English

- *Communism and its Tactics* (1921/22). Republished and introduced by Mark Shipway, Edinburgh 1983.
- *A Sylvia Pankhurst Reader*, ed. Kathryn Dodd (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), including many texts by Sylvia Pankhurst, communist and suffragette.
- *Communism versus reforms, Mistakes of the Communist Party of Ireland*, 1922, pamphlet by the group *Workers' Voice*, 1974 Liverpool/Birkenhead.

Not reprinted:

- *Soviet Russia as I saw it* ('Workers' Dreadnought' Publisher, 1921).

In French

- 'Pensée et action communistes dans la III<sup>e</sup> Internationale' (1919) in *Invariance*, No. 1, 1969.
- 'La grande conspiration contre le socialisme russe et allemand' (1919) in *Cahiers du communisme de conseils*, No. 9, Marseilles, September 1971.

**Karl Plättner**

The main representative of the 'terrorist' tendency in the KAPD. Some of his texts have been republished:

- *Der Weg zur Räte-Diktatur* (Halle, 1919).
- *Die Soziale Revolution* (Berlin: Karin Kramer Verlag, 1973). Original title: *Das Fundament und die Organisierung der sozialen Revolution* (Hamburg, 1919).
- *Rühle im Dienste der Konterrevolution. Das ost-sächsische Sportkommunisten-Kartell oder die revolutionäre Klassenkampf-Partei* (Hettstedt, 1920).
- *Der organisierte rote Schrecken! Kommunistische Parade-Armee oder organisierter Bandenkampf im Bürgerkrieg* (Berlin, 1921).

**Karl Schröder**

- *Vom Werden der neuen Gesellschaft*, 1920, has been republished in Kool 1970. A bibliography of his political (as well as literary) works can be found in *Intellektueller Linksradikalismus in der Weimarer Republik*, by Hans-Harald Müller (Berlin: Scriptor Verlag, 1977), pp. 157–62.

**Henk Canne Meijer**

One of the main theoreticians of council-communism in Holland: *Das Werden einer neuen Arbeiterbewegung* (*Räte-Korrespondenz*, No. 8/9, 1935), has been republished in the already-cited collection: *Partei und Revolution*. Web: <http://www.left-dis.nl/d/arbeweg.htm>

## In French

- *Le mouvement des conseils en Allemagne, ICO*, No. 101, Paris, 1971.

## In English

- ‘Socialism Lost’ republished in *International Review*, No. 37, 1986. This text, written at the end of the 1950s, expresses Canne Meijer’s disillusionment with the revolutionary movement. With a (polemical) introduction by Marc Chirik.

**Henriëtte Roland Holst-van der Schalk**

On Gorter and Henriëtte Roland-Holst, bibliographies from ‘Nederlands Letterkundig Museum’ (Archief en Museum voor het Vlaamse Cultuurleven), The Hague, 1977. Web: <http://www.letmus.nl/ace.html>.

**Karl Schröder**

*Vom Werden der neuen Gesellschaft*, Berlin 1920. A later edition with notes from the editor was published in Fritz Kool: *Die Linke gegen die Parteiherrschaft* (Olten: Walter Verlag AG, 1970).

**Wolffheim and Laufenberg**

Before becoming ‘national Bolsheviks’ and abandoning the communist left, Friedrich Wolffheim (1888–1942) and Heinrich Laufenberg (1872–1932) had been theoreticians of the Unionist movement and the anti-trade-union factory-organisations.

## In French

- Laufenberg, *La révolution à Hamburg* (1919).
- Wolffheim, *Organisations d’entreprise ou syndicats?* (1919)

These texts both appear in Denis Authier and Jean Barrot (eds.), *La Gauche communiste en Allemagne* (Paris: Payot, 1976).

## In German

- Laufenberg, *Der politische Streik*, 1914 (Berlin/Bonn: Verlag J.H.W. Dietz Nachf., 1976).
- Laufenberg and Wolffheim: *Imperialismus und Demokratie. Ein Wort zum Weltkriege* (Hamburg, 1914); reprint, 1978.
- Laufenberg and Wolffheim, *Demokratie und Organisation. Grundlinien proletarischer Politik*, (Hamburg: Heinrich Laufenberg, 1915).
- Laufenberg, *Die Hamburger Revolution*, Hamburg, 1919 (reprint: Mainz: Verlags- und Buchvertriebsgesellschaft, Helios, 1985).
- Laufenberg, *Die Räteidee in der Praxis des Hamburger Arbeiterrats*, a reprint of his 1919 text *Theorie und Praxis der Arbeiterräte* (Berlin, no date).



- Laufenberg and Wolffheim, *Nation und Arbeiterklasse* (Hamburg: Buchverlag Willaschek and Co, 1920).
- Laufenberg and Wolffheim, *Moskau und die deutsche Revolution* (Hamburg, 1920).
- Laufenberg and Wolffheim, *Revolutionärer Volkskrieg oder konterrevolutionärer Bürgerkrieg? Erste kommunistische Adresse an das deutsche Proletariat* (Hamburg, 1920).

## Pamphlets of the German and Dutch Left

### Collections

- *La Gauche allemande* (texts of the KAPD, AAUD, AAU-E, and the KAI, 1920–22), *Invariance*, 1973, translated by Denis Authier.
- Bock, Hans Manfred, *Syndikalismus und Linkskommunismus von 1918–1923* (Meisenheim am Glan: Dokumentarischer Anhang, 1969), pp. 349–426. A large choice of texts by the KAPD, AAU and KAI.

### KAPD-AAU-AAU-E-KAU and 'Rote Kämpfer' Pamphlets

- *Revolutionäre Flugschriften der KAPD*, republished by the European underground press-syndicate, Marburg. A reprint of many pamphlets.

The list of pamphlets that one can consult at the IISG in Amsterdam is almost limitless; we will only mention the most important:

- Dannenberg, Karl, *Warum die Allgemeine Arbeiter-Union?*, Braunschweig, 1919. Dannenberg was a former DeLeonist member of the IWW (Detroit tendency), who built one of the first AAU.
- Menzel, *Revolutionäre Betriebsorganisation und Allgemeine Arbeiter-Union* (Dresden, 1919), by the Rühle tendency.
- Roche, Karl, *Die Allgemeine Arbeiter-Union* (Hamburg 1920). Text written before the formation of the FAU, by a future leader of this organisation.
- *Das Exekutivkomitee der 3. Internationale und die Kommunistische Arbeiter-Partei Deutschlands* (Berlin: Verlag der KAPD Berlin, 1920).
- *Programm der KAPD* (Berlin, 1920).
- Goldstein, Arthur, *Nation und Internationale. Eine kritische Auseinandersetzung mit dem Hamburger Kommunismus* (Berlin: KAPD, 1920).
- Schröder, Karl and Fritz Wendel, *Wesen und Ziel der Revolutionären Betriebs-Organisation* (Berlin-Neukölln: KAPD, 1920). Friedrich Wendel (1886–1960) was a printer; a 'national Bolshevik', he left the KAPD in August 1920 and returned to the SPD.
- *Gewerkschaften oder Allgemeine Arbeiter-Union? Reform oder Revolution?* Berlin, 1920.
- *Programm der AAU* (Leipzig, 12–14 December 1920).

- Seemann, Johannes (Bernard Reichenbach), *Der Steuerabzug vom Lohn* (Berlin: KAPD, 1921).
- *Die Allgemeine Arbeiter-Union (revolutionäre Betriebsorganisationen)*, Berlin, 1921.
- *Die Sowjetregierung und die 3. Internationale im Schlepptau der Internationalen Bourgeoisie!* (Berlin, December 1921). Drawn up by Dr. Adolf Dethmann (Kiel), one of the future leaders of the Essen tendency. This pamphlet, which was written before the split, called for the foundation of the KAI; it was translated into Dutch by Gorter and published in 1922 by the KAPN in Amsterdam.
- Gorter, Herman *Die Moskauer Internationale* (Berlin: KAPD, 1921).
- *Die Allgemeine Arbeiter-Union (die revolutionäre Betriebsorganisationen)*, herausgegeben von der AAUD (Berlin, 1923).
- *Die Kommunistische Arbeiter-Internationale, Räte-Internationale oder Führer-Internationale*. Berlin, 1923. A polemic by the KAPD-Berlin against the Essen tendency.
- Guttman, Ketty, *Los von Moskau!*, Hamburg, 1924, AAU-E pamphlet. Ketty Guttman (1883–1967), a KPD militant, was active in the women workers' movement, including the prostitutes' movement, in Hamburg-Altona, and broke in 1924 with the KPD.
- *Programm der KAPD. Organisations-Status*, Berlin, 1924. Programme adopted by its 1923 congress.
- Gallert, Otto (probably Karl Schröder), *Der Hitlerprozess, der Prozess der deutschen Republik* (Berlin, KAPD, 1924); pamphlet of the Essen tendency.
- *Nieder mit dem bürgerlichen Parlament! Alle Macht den Räten!* Berlin, 1924, KAPD/AAU pamphlet.
- *Die KPD im eigenen Spiegel, aus der Geschichte der KPD und der III. Internationale*, Berlin, 1926. A long polemical pamphlet, illustrated with numerous KAPD quotes against 'KPD opportunism'.
- *Von der Revolution zur Konterrevolution. Russland bewaffnet die Reichswehr*. Published by the KAPD and the AAU (Berlin, 1927).
- *Die AAUE. Was sie ist und was sie will* (Frankfurt, 1927).
- *Wer betrügt die Massen?* (Berlin: AAU-E, 1929).
- *Kritik an den Waffen. Eine Betrachtung über wirtschaftliche und politische Arbeiterorganisationen, ihr Wesen, ihre Rolle im Proletarischen Klassenkampf* (Leipzig: AAU-E 1931). A preparatory discussion pamphlet for the founding congress of the KAU.
- *Offener Brief an den Arbeitergenossen der marxistischen Parteien* (Berlin: AAU-E, 1931).
- *Warum bleiben die Massen in der Partei?*, Verlag 'der Rätekommunist' (Berlin, 1931).
- *Die Totentanz des Kapitalismus. Die 'Demokratie', die Arbeiterklasse* (Berlin: KAPD, October 1932). Web: <http://www.left-dis.nl/> (German index).
- *Kann der Trotzismus wirklich siegen? Grundlinien einer Trotzki-Kritik, 'Rote Kämpfer'* (Berlin, October 1932). This text explains theoretical critics of Trotskyism, from a

KAPDist point of view. Perhaps written by Arthur Goldstein. (Web: <http://www.left-dis.nl/d/trotzkismus.pdf>)

- *Der Kampf um die Macht in der Gegenwart. Grundlinien eines Programmes revolutionärer Sozialisten*, a *Rote Kämpfer* pamphlet (Dresden, 1932).
- *Vom Kapitalismus zum Imperialismus*, AAU-E pamphlet (Berlin 1932). Published by Fritz Parlow (1905–83). USPD Youth in 1919; KPD Youth in 1920; AAU-E after 1923; one of the editors of the *Einheitsfront*, 1924–6, Proletarian Freethinkers' Movement; an organiser in the propaganda-office of the AAU-E, he joined the KAU in 1932 and was the last legal editor of the *Kampfzettel* in 1933. After February 1933, involved in illegal work and then interned in Nazi *lagers*; during the war, he was interned in an American POW camp; he became a member of the SED (Berlin) and a member of Weiland's socialist circle; a bookseller in East Berlin, he had to flee to West Berlin in 1950 in order to escape imminent arrest by the Russian secret police; he published *Neues Beginnen* after the 'kidnapping' of Weiland by the NKVD, and worked with Willy Huhn; a freethinker and SPD member after 1954, he was an editor of the review *Berliner Freie Information*, Berlin, 1976–84, organ of the Freethinkers' Association.
- *Massenaktion*, a pamphlet by the KAU (Berlin, 1933). Republication of articles from *Kampfzettel* in 1932.

For the most complete bibliography of pamphlets and internal documents of the KAPD-AAU, AAU-E, and *Rote Kämpfer*, see Olaf Ihlau's *Die Roten Kämpfer. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung in der Weimarer Republik und im Dritten Reich* (Erlangen: Politladen-Reprint, 1971), pp. 206–9.

The following have been republished in English:

- 'The Programme of the KAPD (1920)', in the Communist Workers' Organisation (CWO) review *Revolutionary Perspectives*, No. 4, London, and ICC's *International Review*, No. 97, London.
- *Theses on the Party* (1921). ICC's *International Review*, No. 41, second quarter 1985, and in the Communist Workers' Organisation (CWO) review *Revolutionary Perspectives*, No. 2.

***Pamphlets by the GIC, the Communistenbond 'Spartacus' and Other Council-Communist Groups***

1929–1940

- *Grundprinzipien kommunistischer Produktion und Verteilung* (Berlin, 1930). Drawn up by Jan Appel and Henk Canne Meijer. Reprinted in 1970, Berlin: Rüdiger Blankertz Verlag.
- *Entwicklungslinien in der Landwirtschaft*, 1930.

- *De beweging van het kapitalistisch bedrijfsleven* ('The Life of Capitalist Enterprise'), 1932. On the nature of the crisis. By Benjamin Aäron Sijes.
- *De arbeiders, het parlement, het communisme*, 1933. An anti-parliamentarian pamphlet written anonymously by Pannekoek.
- *Kiest Kobus onze man*, anti-parliamentary pamphlet published by the LAO, the GIC and a 'groep van radencommunisten', (The Hague, 1933)
- *Werklozenbeweging en klassenstrijd* ('The movement of the unemployed and the class-struggle'), 1934.
- *Stellingen omtrent revolutionaire bedrijfskernen, partijen en dictatuur* ('Theses on revolutionary workplace cells, the party and dictatorship') 1934. Anonymous pamphlet by Pannekoek.
- *Stellingen over het bolsjevisme* ('Theses on Bolshevism'). Helmut Wagner drew up these theses in 1934.
- *Bedrijfsbezetting, oorlogsverhinderend, individuele daden, boycotactie tegen Duitsland* (GIC, 1935).
- *De tegenstellingen tusschen Luxemburg en Lenin*, 1935. By Paul Mattick.
- *Het Volksfront marcheert*, edited by 'linksche arbeiders', The Hague, 1936. By Cajo Brendel.
- *Communisme en godsdienst*, 1936. By Anton Pannekoek.
- *Eenheidsbesef en klassenstrijd*, 1936?
- *De ontwikkeling van de buitenlandsche politiek der Sovjet Unie 1917–1935*, 1936.
- *Anarchisme, Communisme en Revolutie*, published by some 'Raden Communisten' (1938?)
- *Bekentenissen aan de lopende band-de Moskou processen*, GIC, 1938. On the Moscow trials of 1936–7.
- *Bloed-honden maken pogrom!* ('Bloodhounds carry out pogroms'), 1938. On anti-Semitism; a denunciation of fascism and anti-fascism in the Netherlands.
- *De wereld in slagorde* ('The world in battle-order'), 1938–9.
- *De zwendel van Munchen* ('The fallacy of Munich'), 1938.
- *De tweede wereld-oorlog. Wanneer?* ('The Second World-War. When?'), 1938. Simultaneously published in Belgium by the *Ligue des Communistes Internationalistes*. Concerning the inevitability of war and the workers' struggle against it.

After 1945:

- *Van slavenmaatschappij tot arbeidersmacht*, 1946 (From slave-society to workers' power).
- *Taak en wezen van de nieuwe partij*, 1945 ('The nature and task of the new party').
- *Inauguraal Adres. Open brief aan de hoofd- en handarbeiders aller landen; Communistenbond Spartacus*, 1945. (Web: <http://www.left-dis.nl/nl/inaughtm.pdf>)
- *Spartacus en de verkiezingen* (Amsterdam: De Vlam, 1946).

- *Le Monde nouveau*, 1947. In French, for the 1947 Brussels Conference.
- *De Grondbeginselen der Communistische productie en distributie* (Amsterdam: GIC, 1950).
- *De opstand der arbeiders in Oost-Duitsland (1953)* ('The 1953 Working-Class Uprising In East Germany'); (*Spartacusbond*, 1953). By Cajo Brendel.
- *Lessen uit de Parijse commune* (*Spartacusbond*, 1953). By Cajo Brendel.
- *Milovan Djilas en de nieuwe klasse*, (*Spartacusbond*, 1958). By Cajo Brendel.
- *Het Ros Beyaard en zijn berijders* (on the 1961 wildcat-strikes in Belgium) (*Spartacusbond*, 1961). By Stan Poppe.
- *Van Beria tot Zjoekof. Sociaal-economische achtergrond van de déstalinisatie* ('From Beria to Khrushchev; the social-economic basis of de-Stalinisation') (*Spartacusbond*, April 1961). By Theo Maassen.

#### In English

- *Fundamental Principles of Communist Production and Distribution* (Movement for Workers' Councils, 1990). Web: <http://reality.gn.apc.org/econ/giki.htm>.
- *Theses on Bolshevism*, reprinted under the title *The Bourgeois Role of Bolshevism*, by the Glasgow People's Press, 1980s, using the translation produced by the APCF in the 1930s.
- *Inaugural Address. – Open Letter to the Brain and Hand Workers of all Countries*, *Communistenbond*, 1945.

#### *Pamphlets by the Bulgarian Left-Communists*

- Deliradev, Pavel and Mikhail Guerdjikov, *Vojna ili revoljucija* ('War or Revolution'), (Sofia: Levski 1910). Guerdjikov (1877–1947), friend of the Marxist Deliradev, would in June 1919 be the main founder of the Bulgarian Anarcho-Communist Federation.
- Zidarov, Slava, *Inertnost za samosakhranenie ili tchrez smeli aktsii kam okonchatelna pobeda* ('Inertia by self-preservation or resolute action towards final victory') (Sofia 1919). After 1920 Zidarov – pseudonym of Solomon Lazarov Goldštajn (1884–1968) – was living in Russia. He was a member of the Bulgarian social democracy from 1906, a leader of the metalworkers' union till 1913. He found refuge in France and was employed as a worker in Renault, Paris. In contact with Lenin, he became a Bolshevik in 1915. He played a role in the Zimmerwald left in Switzerland, was a friend of Jakob Herzog, but came back to Moscow in 1918. Sent by Lenin to Bulgaria in March 1919, he criticised the passivity of the BCP. He came back to Moscow in 1920 and took part to the second congress of the Comintern, without a mandate, gaining the support of his friend Herzog, an antiparlamentarian, in the debate on parliamentarism. He later got into trouble under Stalinism in the 1930s, but he was finally freed and 'rehabilitated' after 1956. He died in Moscow in 1968.
- Ederov, E., *Napred ili nazad* ('Forwards or backwards') (Sofia: Franklin, 1919). Expel-

led from the party in March 1919, Ederov was a collaborator of the radical review *Sotsialisticheski pregled*.

- Deliradev, Pavel, *Komunisticheskite grupirovki v Bulgariya* ('The communist groups in Bulgaria') (Sofia, 1920).
- Deliradev, Pavel, *Protiv parlamentarisma* ('Against parliamentarism') (Sofia, 1920).
- Kolinkoev, Ivan, Dimitar Nedyalkov *et alii*, *Pismo kam rabotnitsite pri BKP i Obshchitya c. Sayuz (t.s.)* (Burgas 1920). An open letter to the workers 'organised' by the BCP and the Bulgarian unions; against parliamentarism and trades-unions.
- Barzev, Georgi *Internatsional i Balgarskata Komunisticheska Partiya*, (The International and the Bulgarian Communist Party) (Sofia, 1920). Against Lenin's opportunism.

We should here mention the name of Cajo Brendel (one of the main members of the Group *Daad en Gedachte*, 1964–98). See his own bibliography in his book *Anton Pannekoek Denker der Revolution* (Freiburg: Ça Ira Verlag, 2001), pp. 232–4.

### Eye-Witness Accounts

- Brendel, Cajo, 'Die "GIC" in Holland. Persönliche Erinnerungen aus den Jahren 1934–1939', in *Jahrbuch 2* (Marxistische Revolutionstheorien), 1974. Brendel was a member of the GIC from 1934 and for some time after. His memoirs deal with the group's activities and the divisions that arose in the 'councilist' movement in 1935. Translation into French, 'Le groupe des communistes internationalistes de Hollande', in 'Echanges et mouvement', pamphlet, Paris, April 1999.
- De Kadt, Jacques, *Uit mijn communistentijd* ('My Communist Life') (Amsterdam, 1965).
- Hölz, Max, *Vom 'Weissen Kreuz' zur roten Fahne*, 1929. Reprinted in 1969, Verlag Neue Kritik, Frankfurt. His memoirs of the KAPD and KPD were written while in prison. Max Hölz's autobiography has been published in French under the title *Un rebelle dans la révolution* (Paris: Editions Spartacus, May–June 1988).
- Icarus (Ernst Schneider), *The Wilhelmshaven Revolt: A Chapter of the Revolutionary Movement in the German Navy 1918–1919*; preface by Mat Kavanagh (London: Freedom Press, 1944). 'Icarus' was the pseudonym of Ernst Schneider (1883–1970?).
- Jacoby, Henry, *Von der Kaiserschule zu Hitlers Zuchthaus. Erlebnisse und Begegnungen. Geschichte einer Jugend links-aussen in der Weimarer Republik*. Testimony of a former partisan of Rühle; elements on the German council-communist milieu (Frankfurt: Dipa-Verlag, 1980).
- Jung, Cläre, *Paradiesvögel. Erinnerungen* (Hamburg: Nautilus Edition, 1987). Autobiography of the wife of Franz Jung. Elements on the KAPD.

- Jung, Franz, *Der Weg nach unten* (Berlin, 1962); this was republished under the title *Der Torpedokäfer* (Hamburg: Nautilus, 1988).
- Jung, Franz, *Nach Russland! Schriften zur russischen Revolution*, Werke 5 (Hamburg: Edition Nautilus, 1991). Jung's testimony on Russia, which he first knew as a delegate of the KAPD, then as a factory director until the end of 1923, before returning illegally to Germany.
- Knüfken, Hermann, *Vom Kieler Matrosenaufstand nach Leningrad. Stationen eines deutschen revolutionären Matrosen 1917–1930* (Berlin: Basisdruck, 2008).
- Luteraan, Barend: Interview with an ex-leader of the KAPD conserved on magnetic tape by the *Vrij Nederland* journalist Igor Cornelissen. Part of this was used in 'Lenin vroeg: hoe gaat het met Gorter?', *Vrij Nederland*, 28 November 1964. ('Lenin asked me: how is Gorter?').
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- Engel, Gerhard, *Die politisch-ideologische Entwicklung Johann Kniefs (1880–1919). Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der Bremer Linksradikalen*, Thesis (East Berlin, 1967).
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  - Müller, Hans-Harald, ‘Vom Proletarier zur Roten Fahnen. Untersuchungen zur politischen Biographie und zum autobiographischen Roman *Vaterlandslose Gesellen* von Adam Scharer’, in *1WK*, No. 1, Berlin, March 1975.
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  - Müller, Hans-Harald ‘Karl Schröder (1884–1950). Ein linksradikaler Intellektueller in (und ausserhalb) der SPD’, in Peter Lösche, Michael Scholling and Franz Walrer (eds.), *Vor dem Vergessen bewahren. Lebenswege Weimarer Sozialdemokraten* (Berlin, 1988).
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On Pfemfert and *Die Aktion*:

- *Die Revolutions G.m.b.H.: Agitation und politische Satire in der ‘Aktion’*. – Choice of texts and postface by Knut Hickethier, Wilhelm Heinrich Pott and Kristina Zerges (Wißmar and Steinbach: Anabas, 1973).
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On Gerd Arntz:

- Bohnen, Uli and Kees Vollemans, *Gerd Arntz Politieke prenten tussen twee oorlogen* (Nijmegen: SUN, 1973). Gerd Arntz (1900–88), a talented expressionist artist active in the AAU-E in Germany then within the KAPN in 1934–6. He left famous etchings, engravings on wood illustrating the council-communist viewpoint against capital, democracy and Nazism.

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### *On Gorter and the Essen Tendency*

There is hardly anything on the Essen current, which was dominated by Gorter's strongly idealist tendency:

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- Cornelissen, Igor, 'Herman Gorter en de KAP', in *Vrij Nederland*, 28 November 1964.
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- Brendel, Cajo, *Anton Pannekoek, Denker der Revolution* (Freiburg: Ça ira Verlag, 2001). German translation of the Dutch text, updated.
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- Last, Jef, *Rinus van der Lubbe. Doodstraf voor een Provo*. Second edition (Dinxperlo: Interland, 1967) of the last essay, with a preface by Igor Cornelissen. Jef Last was a friend of André Gide from 1935 (he visited Russia with the French writer in 1936). He was a journalist, poet and novelist (novel *Zuiderzee*, 1934). He took part in the Spanish Civil War in 1937 with the rank of captain in the International Brigades, and left the CPN in 1938. From 1941 to 1945, he was editor with Tom Rot and others of the illegal socialist-pacifist review *De Vonk*. From 1950–53 he was a teacher and governmental advisor for culture and art in Bali. He was also a translator from Japanese and Chinese. In his book, he has given a more sympathetic portrait of van der Lubbe than that of 1938, being himself a partisan of the Dutch *Provo* Movement. Jef Last's literary work comprises some 65 volumes, including poetry, fiction and essays.
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### *Between the SAP and the German Communist Left: 'Rote Kämpfer'*

This group, formed by former leaders of the KAP, such as Schwab, Schröder, Goldstein, Reichenbach, Utzelmann, and new militants as Helmut Rudolf Wagner (1904–1989), Alfred Engel (1909–1997), Willy Huhn (1909–1970), Bruno Lindtner, Erwin Beck (1911–1988), Ernst Froebel (1912–2001), and so on, was formed inside the SAP, from where it split to form an independent group defending the original positions of the KAP on Russia, the unions and so on. It was destroyed by Nazi repression in 1936.

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**KPD (Spartakusbund); KAP and AAU, AAU-E Congress Proceedings (Protokolle)**

Interventions of the KPD left (*Spartakusbund*) which gave birth to the KAPD, can be found in:

- *Bericht über den Gründungsparteitag der Kommunistischen Partei Deutschlands (Spartakusbund)*, 30.12.1918–1.1.1919, Berlin, 1919. Reprint by Hermann Weber: *Der Gründungsparteitag der KPD. Protokolle und Materialien*, Frankfurt: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1969.
- *Bericht über den 2. Parteitag der Kommunistischen Partei Deutschlands (Spartakusbund)*, Heidelberg, 20–24 October 1919.
- *Bericht über den 3. Parteitag der Kommunistischen Partei Deutschlands (Spartakusbund) am 25. und 26. Februar 1920* (in Karlsruhe), o.O. o.J.
- *Bericht über den Gründungsparteitag der KAPD*, 4 and 5 April 1920, Berlin (re-issued, introduced, and annotated by Hans Manfred Bock, in *Jahrbuch 5*, Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1977, pp. 185–242; founding congress of the KAPD; speakers' names are not mentioned).
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- *Protokoll des 1. ordentlichen Parteitages des KAPD vom 1. bis 4. August 1920 in Berlin* (The proceedings of the First Congress of the KAPD, 1920, Berlin). Edited by Clemens Klockner (Darmstadt: Verlag für wissenschaftliche Publikationen, 1981).
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- *Protokoll des ausserordentlichen Parteitages des KAPD vom 11. bis 14.9.1921 in Berlin*. The proceedings of the KAPD's extraordinary Congress held in Berlin in September 1921 (Darmstadt: Verlag für wissenschaftliche Publikationen, 1986).
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# Acronyms

AAB	<i>Algemeene Arbeiders Bond</i> ('General Workers' Union'; Netherlands, 1922–3)
AAUD	<i>Allgemeine Arbeiter-Union Deutschlands</i> ('General Workers' Union of Germany')
AAUD-E	<i>Allgemeine Arbeiter-Union Deutschlands – Einheitsorganisation</i> ('General Workers' Union of Germany – Unitary Organisation')
ABA	Arbejder-bevaegelsens Bibliotek og Arkiv ('Library and Archives of the Workers' Movement', Copenhagen)
ADGB	<i>Allgemeine Deutsche Gewerkschaftsbund</i> (German Social-Democratic union)
AGWA	<i>Archiv für die Geschichte des Widerstandes und der Arbeit</i> , review for social history, Bochum
ANDB	<i>Algemeene Nederlandsche Diamantbewerdersbond</i> (Diamond workers' union-association)
APCF	Anti-Parliamentary Communist Federation (Great Britain)
ARP	<i>Anti-Revolutionaire Partij</i> ('Anti-Revolutionary Party', Dutch Calvinist party)
BAS	<i>Bond van Anarcho-Socialisten</i> ('League of Anarcho-Socialists')
BCP	Bulgarian Communist Party
BvCS	<i>Bond van Christen-Socialisten</i> ('League of Christian Socialists'; 1907–21)
BKP	<i>Balgarskii Komunisticheski Partii</i> (CP, Bulgaria)
BKSP	<i>Bond van Kommunistische Strijd- en Propagandacclubs</i> (CPH split, 1924–7)
BRKP	<i>Balgarskii Rabotnitcheskii Komunisticheski Partii</i> (KAP, Bulgaria)
BRAC	<i>Bond van Religieuse Anarcho-Communisten</i> (Dutch Christian Anarchists)
BRS	<i>Bond van Revolutionaire Socialisten</i> ('League of Revolutionary Socialists'; 1935–40)
BSP	British Socialist Party
BWN	<i>Biografisch Woordenboek van Nederland</i>
BWSA	<i>Biografisch woordenboek van het socialisme en de arbeidersbeweging in Nederland</i>
BWSDP	Bulgarian Workers' Socialist-Democratic Party
CCI	<i>Comité communiste internationaliste</i> (French Trotskyist group during the Second World-War)
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CI	Communist International

CIRA	Centre international de recherches sur l'anarchisme, Lausanne
CNT	<i>Confederación Nacional del Trabajo</i> ('National Labour Confederation' – Spain)
Comintern	<i>Kommunistische Internationale</i> (Communist International)
CPH	<i>Communistische Partij Holland</i> ('The Communist Party of Holland'; became CPN in December 1935)
CPH-CC	<i>Communistische Partij Holland-Centraal Comité</i> (1926–June 1930): Wijnkoop's split-party
CPGB	Communist Party of Great Britain
CPN	<i>Communistische Partij Nederland</i> ('Dutch Communist Party')
CPO	<i>Communistische Partij Oppositie</i> ('Communist Party-Opposition')
CR	<i>Communistes-Révolutionnaires</i> (France, 1943–6)
CRM	<i>Comité van Revolutionaire Marxisten</i> ('Committee of Revolutionary Marxists'; 1942–5)
CWI	Communist Workers' International (KAI)
CWO	Communist Workers' Organisation – Great Britain (1974–)
CWP	Communist Workers Party – Great Britain (Sylvia Pankhurst's group)
EKKI	<i>Exekutiefkomitee der Kommunistischen Internationale</i> (Executive Committee of the Communist International – ECCI)
EL	<i>Entschiedene Linke</i> ('Resolute Left' – Germany, 1926)
EVb	<i>Eenheids Vakbeweging</i> ('Unitary Trade-Union Movement')
EVC	<i>Einheidsvakcentrale</i> ('Unitary Union Central'; CPN union)
FAI	<i>Federación Anarquista Iberica</i> ('Iberian Anarchist Federation')
FAM	<i>Förbundet Arbetarmakt</i> (Sweden); 1972–85
FAN	<i>Federatie van Anarchisten Nederland</i> ('Federation of Anarchists in the Netherlands')
FAUD	<i>Freie Arbeiter-Union Deutschlands</i> ('Free Workers' Union of Germany')
FOI	<i>Front ouvrier international</i>
FRS	<i>Federatie van Revolutionaire Socialisten</i> ('Federation of Revolutionary Socialists')
FSA	<i>Federatie van Sociaal-Anarchisten</i> ('Federation of Social Anarchists')
FSJ	<i>Freie sozialistische Jugend</i> (USPD, then KPD Youth, founded 27 October 1918)
GBL	<i>Groep van Bolsjewiki-Leninisten</i> (Dutch Trotskyists, 1938–42)
GCF	<i>Gauche Communiste de France</i> ('Communist Left of France'); 1945–52
GCI	<i>Gauche Communiste Italienne</i> ('Italian Communist Left')
GDR	German Democratic Republic
GHA	<i>Geschäftsführender Hauptausschuß</i> (executive organ of the KAPD)
GIC	<i>Groepen van Internationale Communisten</i> ('Groups of International Communists'; 1927–42)

GIK	<i>Gruppe Internationaler Kommunisten</i> ('Groups of International Communists')
GIS	<i>Gruppen Internationaler Sozialisten</i> (1946–50)
GpF	<i>Gemeinschaft proletarischer Freidenker</i> ('German Proletarian Freethinkers' Association')
IAF	<i>Internationaal Arbeiders Front</i> (International Workers' Front)
IAK	<i>Internationale Anti-Militaristische Komité</i> (International Anti-Militarist Committee)
IAMB	<i>Internationaal anti-Militaristisch Bureau</i> (International Anti-Militarist Bureau, 1921, editor of <i>De Wapens Neder!</i> )
IAMV	<i>Internationale anti-Militaristische Vereeniging</i> (International Anti-Militarist Association); 1904
IARV	<i>Internationale Arbeiders-Raden Vereeniging</i> ('International Workers' Councils Association'; Belgium)
ICC	International Communist Current (1975–), semi-'Leninist' grouplet
ICC	<i>International Council Correspondence</i> (USA)
ICO	<i>Informations et Correspondance Ouvrières</i>
ICP	International Communist Party (Bordigist; ' <i>Programma comunista</i> ' tendency)
IFBK	<i>Internationale Federatie van Bedrijfs Kerne</i> ('International Federation of Factory-Cells')
IISG	Internationaal Instituut voor Sociaal Geschiedenis (International Institute of Social History)
IKD	<i>Internationale Kommunisten Deutschlands</i> , German ' <i>Linksradikale</i> ', 1918
ILC	International Left-Opposition (Bolshevik-Leninist)
ILO	<i>Informations et liaisons ouvrières</i> (precursor of ICO; 1958–60)
ILP	Independent Labour Party – Britain
INO	<i>Internacia Novaj Officejo</i> (International council-communist news-bureau)
<i>Inprekorr</i>	<i>Internationale Presse Korrespondenz</i>
IPSO	Instituut voor Politiek en Sociaal Onderzoek (Institute for political and social Research – CPN Institute)
ISB	International Socialist Bureau (Second International)
ISDV	<i>Indische Sociaal Democratische Vereniging</i> ('Social-Democratic Alliance of the East Indies'; became the PKI in 1920)
ITF	<i>Internationale Transportarbeiders Federatie</i> (International Transport Workers Federation – ITWF)
IWMA	International Working Men's Association ( <i>Association internationale des Travailleurs</i> – AIT)
IWK	<i>Internationale Wissenschaftliche Korrespondenz zur Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung</i> , Berlin

IWW	Industrial Workers of the World – USA
KAG	<i>Kommunistische Arbeitsgemeinschaft</i> ('Working-class communist association'; group of Paul Levi, 1921)
KAI	<i>Kommunistische Arbeiter-Internationale</i> (Communist Workers' International)
KAJ	<i>Kommunistische Arbeiders-Jeugd</i> (KAPN Youth)
KAJ	<i>Kommunistische Arbeiter Jugend</i> (KAPD Youth)
KAPD	<i>Kommunistische Arbeiter Partei Deutschlands</i> ('Communist Workers' Party of Germany'; 1920–33)
KAPN	<i>Kommunistische Arbeiders Partij in Nederland</i> ('Communist Workers' Party in the Netherlands'; 1921–40)
KAU	<i>Kommunistische Arbeiter-Union</i> ('Communist Workers' Union')
Komintern	<i>Kommunistische Internationale</i> (Communist International)
KAZ	<i>Kommunistische Arbeiter-Zeitung</i>
KPD	Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands ('Communist Party of Germany')
KPO	Kommunistische Partei Opposition (Communist Party-Opposition; the Brandler-Thalheimer tendency in Germany)
KPÖ	<i>Kommunistische Partei Österreichs</i> ('Austrian Communist Party'; 1918)
Krestintern	<i>Krestianskij International</i> (The Peasants' International, linked to the Comintern; from October 1923)
LAO	<i>Linksche Arbeiders Oppositie</i> ('Workers' Left-Opposition')
LCI	<i>Ligue des Communistes Internationalistes</i> ('League of Internationalist Communists – Belgium')
MJC	<i>Marxistisch Jeugd Comité</i> ('Committee of Marxist Youth')
MLL-Front	<i>Marx-Lenin-Luxemburg Front</i> (1940–43)
NAS	<i>Nationaal Arbeids Secretariat</i> ('National Secretariat of Labour')
NHM	<i>Nederlandse Handels Maatschappij</i> (Netherlands commercial company)
NOT	<i>Nederlandsche Overzeetrust Maatschappij</i> (Netherlands overseas trade company)
NCPN	<i>Nieuwe Communistische Partij in Nederland</i> (1992–)
NSB	<i>National-Socialistische Beweging</i> (Dutch Nazi Party)
NSV	<i>Nederlandsch Syndikalistisch Vakverbond</i> ('Dutch Syndicalist Confederation', a split from the NAS, 1923–40)
NVSTP	<i>Nederlandse Vereeniging van Spoor- en Tramwegpersoneel</i> ('Dutch Confederation of Rail and Tramway Personnel')
NVV	<i>Nederlandsch Verbond van Vakverenigingen</i> ('Dutch Trade-Union Confederation' – social-democratic)
OSP	<i>Onafhankelijke Socialistische Partij</i> ('Independent Socialist Party of Holland', 1932–5)



OVB	<i>Onafhankelijk Verbond van Bedrijfsorganisaties</i> ('Independent Confederation of Factory-Organisations')
PCF	<i>Parti communiste français</i> ('French Communist Party')
PNI	<i>Partai Nasional Indonesia</i> ('National Party of Indonesia')
PCd'I	<i>Partito Comunista d'Italia</i> ('Communist Party of Italy')
PCInt	<i>Partito Comunista Internazionalista</i> (Internationalist Communist Party – Italy; <i>Battaglia Comunista</i> tendency)
PCInt	<i>Partito Comunista Internazionale</i> (Internationalist Communist Party – Italy; <i>Programma Comunista</i> tendency)
PIC	<i>International Persmateriaal van of Groep van Internationalen Communisten</i>
PIK	<i>Pressedienst der Internationalen Kommunisten-Holland</i> (the GIC's German-language review)
PKI	<i>Perserikatan Komunis di India</i> (birth-name in 1920); after 1924, <i>Partai Komunis Indonesia</i> ('Communist Party of Indonesia')
PO	<i>Pouvoir ouvrier</i> (France)
POB	<i>Parti Ouvrier Belge</i> ('Belgian Workers' Party')
POUM	<i>Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista</i> ('Workers Party of Marxist Unity' – Spain)
PPR	<i>Politieke Partij Radicalen</i> : 'Radical Political Party' (1968–)
PSI	<i>Partito Socialista Italiano</i> ('Italian Socialist Party')
PSOE	<i>Partido Socialista Obrero Español</i>
PSOP	<i>Parti Socialiste Ouvrier et Paysan</i> ('Workers' and Peasants' Socialist Party' – 'Pivertist')
PSP	<i>Pacifistisch Socialistische Partij</i> ('Pacifist Socialist Party', Netherlands; 1957–91)
PvdA	<i>Partij van de Arbeid</i> ('Dutch Labour Party' after 1946)
RAC	<i>Revolutionair Arbeiders-Comité</i> (BKSP split organisation, 1925)
RCP	<i>Revolutionaire Communistische Partij</i> 'Revolutionary Communist Party' – Trotskyist (1945–53)
RFB	<i>Roter Frontkämpferbund</i> (KPD militia)
RGASPI	Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial'no-politicheskoi istorii (ex-Komintern archives)
RGI	<i>Rote Gewerkschaftsinternationale</i> (or Profintern)
RGO	<i>Rote Gewerkschafts-Opposition</i> (KPD opposition within trades-unions, Germany)
RILU	Red International of Labour Unions (or Profintern)
RK	<i>Räte-Korrespondenz</i> (GIK)
RK	<i>Rote Kämpfer</i> ('Red Fighters')
RKD	<i>Revolutionäre Kommunisten Deutschlands</i>

RKP	<i>Rabotnitcheskii Kommunisticheskii Partij</i> (KAP, Russia)
RKSP	<i>Roomsch-Katholieke Staatspartij</i> (Catholic party)
RSA	<i>Revolutionair-Socialistische Arbeidersbeweging</i> ('Revolutionary Socialist Workers' Movement', 1942)
RSAP	<i>Revolutionaire Socialistische Arbeiders Partij</i> ('Revolutionary Socialist Workers' Party', 1935–40)
RSC	<i>Revolutionaire Socialistisch Comité tegen de Oorlog en zijn Gevolgen</i> ('Revolutionary Socialist Committee against War and its Consequences'), formed in 1916
RSDLP	Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party
RSP	<i>Revolutionaire Socialistische Partij</i> ('Revolutionary Socialist Party'); CPH split, 1929–35
RSV	<i>Religieus Socialistisch Verbond</i> ('Religious Socialist League')
RWL	Revolutionary Workers' League – USA (Oehler's Group)
SAA	<i>Sociaal-Anarchistische Actie</i> ('Social Anarchist Action'), 1917–18
SAG	<i>Sozialistische Arbeitsgemeinschaft</i> ('Socialist Labour Association'; pacifist wing of the SPD, formed in 1916, and led by Hugo Haase, Karl Kautsky, Eduard Bernstein; in April 1917 it became the USPD.)
SAP	<i>Sozialistische Arbeiter-Partei</i> ('Socialist Workers' Party of Germany' – 'left socialists')
SAPMO-BArch	Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR im Bundesarchiv Berlin
SAT	<i>Sennacieca Asocio Tutmonda</i> (World Esperantist Association; 1921)
SAV	<i>Samenwerkende Arbeiders-Vereenigingen</i> ('Workers' Co-operative Union')
SAWC	<i>Southern Advocate for Workers' Councils</i> (Melbourne)
SDAP	<i>Sociaal Democratische Arbeiders Partij</i> ('Social-Democratic Workers' Party' – Troelstra's party; 1894–1946)
SB	<i>Socialisten Bond</i> ('League of Socialists')
SDB	<i>Sociaal-Democratische Bond</i> ('Social-Democratic League')
SDKPiL	<i>Socialdemocracija Krolestwa Polskiego i Litwy</i> ('Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania')
SDC	<i>Sociaal-Democratisch Centrum</i> (1946–59) ('left-fraction' in the PvdA)
SDP	<i>Sociaal-Democratische Partij</i> : ('Social-Democratic Party' – Tribunist)
SED	<i>Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands</i> (state-party of East Germany)
SFIO	<i>Section française de l'Internationale ouvrière</i> (French Socialist Party)
SLP	Socialist Labor Party (DeLeonist; USA)
SouB	<i>Socialisme ou Barbarie</i> (France)
SP	<i>Socialistische Partij</i> ('Socialist Party' – a split from the SDAP, 1918–24)
SPGB	Socialist Party of Great Britain

SWV	<i>Sozialwissenschaftliche Vereinigung</i> (forerunner of the <i>Rote Kämpfer</i> )
TBN	<i>Troelstra Beweging Nederland</i> (a split from the SDAP, 1938–40)
UAP	<i>Unabhängige Arbeiterpartei</i> ('Independent Workers' Party'; German Trotskyist and 'Titoite' group in the 1950s).
UGT	<i>Unión General de Trabajadores</i> (General Workers' Union – the Spanish Socialist trade-union)
USPD	<i>Unabhängige Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands</i> (Independent Social-Democratic Party of Germany, 1917–21)
VCN	<i>Verbond van Communisten Nederland</i> (split from the CPN, 1985–91)
VCP	<i>Vereenigde communistische partij</i> ('United Communist Party', Netherlands, 1999)
VOC	<i>Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie</i> (United East-India Company)
VKPD	<i>Vereinigte Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands</i> , the KPD's name between December 1920 and August 1921
VMV	<i>Vrije Menschen-Verbond</i> ('Libertarian Philanthropic League')
VRUK	<i>Vereinigte revolutionäre Unterstützungskommission</i> (commission of support to political prisoners of the KAP/AAU)
VSTP	<i>Vereeniging van Spoor-en Tram Personeel</i> (tramworkers' union)
VSV	<i>Vrije Socialisten-Vereeniging</i> ('Alliance of Libertarian Socialists')
WAC	<i>Werkloozen Agitatie Comité</i> ('Agitation-Committee of Unemployed Workers')

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